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SATANELLA

A

STORY OF PUNCHESTOWN

BY

G. J. WHITE-MELVILLE

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SATANELLA.

CHAPTER I.

THE BLACK MARE.

"SHE'LL make a chaser anny-how!"

The speaker was a rough-looking man in a frieze coat, with wide mouth, short nose, and grey, honest Irish eyes, that twinkled with humour on occasion, though clouded for the present by disappointment, not to say disgust, and with some reason. In his hand he held a broken strap, with broad and dingy buckle; at his feet, detached from shafts and wheels, lay the body of an ungainly vehicle, neither gig, dog-cart, nor outside car, but something of each, battered and splintered in a dozen places: while "fore-aninst" him, as he called it, winced and fretted a young black mare, snorting, trembling, fractious, and terrified, with ears laid back, tail tucked down to her strong cowering quarters, and an obvious determination on the slightest alarm to kick herself clear of everything once more.

At her head stood a ragged urchin of fourteen; although her eyes showed wild and red above the shabby blinkers, she rubbed her nose against the lad's waistcoat, and seemed to consider him the only friend she had left in the world.

"Get on her back, Patsy," said the man. "Faix, she's a well-lepped wan, an' we'll take a hate out of her at Punchestown, with the blessin'!—Augh! See now, here's the young Captain! Ye're welcome, Captain! It's meself was proud when I seen how ye cleaned them out last week on 'Garryowen.' Ye'll come in, and welcome, Captain. Go on in front now, and I'll show you the way!"

So, while a slim, blue-eyed, young gentleman, with curled moustache, accompanied his entertainer into the house, Patsy took the mare to the stable, where he accoutred her in an ancient saddle, pulpy, weather-stained, with stirrups of most unequal length; proceeding thereafter to force a rusty snaffle into her mouth, with the tightest possible nose-band and a faded green and white front. These arrangements completed, he surveyed the whole, grinning and well-pleased.

That the newcomer could only be a subaltern of Light Dragoons, was obvious from his trim equestrian appearance, his sleek, well-cropped head, the easy sit of his garments, also, perhaps, from an air of imperturbable good-humour and self-confidence, equal to any occasion that might present itself, social, moral, or physical.

Proof against "dandies of punch" and such hospitable provocatives, he soon deserted the parlour for the stable.

"And how is the mare coming on?" said he, standing in the doorway of that animal's dwelling, which she shared with a little cropped jackass, a Kerry cow, and a litter of pigs. "I always said she could gallop a bit, and they're the right sort to stay. But can she jump?"

"The beautifullest ever ye see!" replied her enthusiastic owner. "She'll go whereiver a cat would follow a rat. If there's a harse in Connemara that 'ud change on the sharp edge of a razor, there's the wan that can do't! Kick—stick *and* plasther! it's in their breed; and like th'ould mare before her, so long as you'd hould her, it's my belief she'd stay in the air!"

The object of these praises had now emerged from her stall, and a very likely animal she looked; poor and angular indeed, with a loose neck and somewhat long ears, but in her lengthy frame, and large clean limbs, affording promise for the future of great beauty, no less than extraordinary power and speed. Her head was exceedingly characteristic, lean and taper, showing every vein and articulation beneath the glossy skin, with a wide scarlet nostril and flashing eye, suggestive of courage and resolution, not without a considerable leavening of temper. There are horses, and women too, that stick at nothing. To a bold rider, the former are invaluable, because with these it is possible to keep their mettle under control.

"Hurry now, Patsy!" said the owner, as that little personage, diving for the stirrup, which he missed, looked imploringly to his full-grown companions for a "leg up."

But it was not in the nature of our young officer, by name John Walters, known in his regiment as "Daisy," to behold an empty saddle of any kind without longing to fill it. He had altered the stirrups, cocked up his left leg for a lift, and lit fairly in his seat, before the astonished filly could make any more vigorous protest than a lurch of her great strong back and whisk of her long tail.

"Begorra! ye'll get it now!" said her owner, half to himself, half to the Kerry cow, on which discreet animal he thought it prudent to rivet his attention, distrusting alike the docility of his own filly, and the Englishman's equestrian skill.

Over the rough paved yard, through the stone gap by the peat-stack, not the little cropped jackass himself could have behaved more soberly. But where the spring flowers were peeping in the turf enclosure beyond, and the upright bank blazed in its golden glory of gorse-bloom, the devilry of many ancestors seemed to pass with the keen mountain-air into the filly's mettle. Her first plunge of hilarity and insubordination would have unseated half the rough-riders that ever mishandled a charger in the school.

Once—twice, she reached forward, with long, powerful plunges, shaking her ears, and dashing wildly at her bridle, till she got rein enough to stick her nose in the air, and break away at speed.

A snaffle, with or without a nose-band, is scarcely the instrument by which a violent animal can be brought on its haunches at short notice; but Daisy was a consummate horseman, firm of seat and cool of temper, with a head that never failed him, even when debarred from the proper use of his hands.

He could guide the mare, though incapable of controlling her. So he sent her at the highest place in the fence before him, and, fast as she was going, the active filly changed her stride on the bank with the accuracy of a goat, landing lightly beyond, to scour away once more like a frightened deer.

"You *can* jump!" said he, as she threw up the head that had been in its right place hardly an instant, while she steadied herself for the leap; "and I believe you're a flyer. But, by Jove! you're a rum one to steer!"

She was quite out of his hand again, and laid herself down to her work with the vigour of a steam-engine. The daisy-sprinkled turf fleeted like falling water beneath those long, smooth, sweeping strides.

They were careering over an open upland country, always slightly on the rise, till it grew to a bleak brown mountain far away under the western sky. The enclosures were small; but notwithstanding the many formidable banks and ditches with which it was intersected, the whole landscape wore that appearance of space and freedom so peculiar to Irish scenery, so pleasing to the sportsman's eye. "It looked like galloping," as they say, though no horse, without great jumping powers, could have gone two fields.

It took a long Irish mile, at racing pace, to bring the mare to her bridle, and nothing but her unusual activity saved the rider from half-a-dozen rattling falls during his perilous experiment. She bent her neck at last, and gave to her bit in a potato-ground; nor, if he had resolved to buy her for the sake of her speed and stamina while she was running away with him, did he like her less, we may be sure, when they arrived at that mutual understanding, which links together so mysteriously the intelligences of the horse and its rider.

Turning homewards, the pair seemed equally pleased with each other. She played gaily with the snaffle now, answering hand and heel cheerfully, desirous only of being ridden at the largest fences, a fancy in which he indulged her, nothing loth. Trotting up to four feet and a half of stone wall, round her own stable-yard, she slipped over it without an effort, and her owner, a discerning person enough, added fifty to her price on the spot.

"She's a good sort," said the soldier, patting her reeking neck, as he slid to the ground; "but she's uncommon bad to steer when her monkey's up! Sound, you say, and rising four year old? I wonder how she's bred?"

Such a question could not but entail a voluminous reply. Never, it appeared, in one strain, had been united the qualities of so many illustrious ancestors. Her pedigree seemed enriched with "all the blood of all the Howards," and her great-great-great-grandam was "Camilla by Trentham, out of Phantom, sister to Magistrate!"

"An' now ye've bought her, Captain," said our friend in frieze, "ye've taken the best iver I bred, an' the best iver I seen. Av' I'd let her out o'my sight wanst at Ballinasloe, the Lord-Liftinint 'ud have been acrass her back, while I'm tellin' ye, an' him leadin' the hunt, up in Meath, or about the Fairy House and Kilrue. The spade wasn't soldered yet that would dig a ditch to hould her; and when them sort's tired, Captain, begorra! the very breeches 'ud be wore to rags betwixt your knees! You trust *her*, and you trust *me!* Wait till I tell ye now. There's only wan thing on this mortial earth she won't do for ye!"

"And what's that?" asked the other, well pleased.

"She'll not back a bill!" was the answer; "but if iver she schames with ye, renaging* or such like, by this book, I'll be ashamed to look a harse, or so much as a jackass in the face again!"

So the mare was sent for; and Patsy, with a stud reduced to the donkey and the Kerry cow, shed bitter tears when she went away.

* Refusing.

CHAPTER II.

MISS DOUGLAS.

IT is time to explain how the young black mare became linked with the fate of certain persons, whose fortunes and doings, good or bad, are related in this story.

To that end the scene must be shifted, and laid in London—London, on a mild February morning, when even South Audley Street and its tributaries seemed to exhale a balmy fragrance from the breath of spring.

In one of these, a window stood open on the drawing-room floor — so wide open that the baker, resting his burden on the area railings below, sniffed the perfume of hyacinths bursting their bulbs, and beat time with floury shoes to the notes of a wild and plaintive melody, wailing from the pianoforte within.

Though a delicate little breakfast-service had not yet been removed from its spider-legged table, the performer at the instrument was already hatted and habited for a ride. Her whole heart, nevertheless, seemed to be in the tips of her fingers while she played, drawing from the keys such sighs of piteous plaint, such sobs of sweet seductive sorrow, as ravished the soul of the baker below, creating a strong desire to scale the window-sill, and peep into the room. Could he have executed such a feat, this is what he would have seen.

A woman of twenty-five, tall, slim-waisted, with a wealth of blue-black hair, all made fast and coiled away beneath her riding-hat in shining folds, massive as a three-inch cable. A woman of graceful gestures, undulating like the serpent; of a shapely figure, denoting rather the graces of action, than the beauty of repose; lithe, self-reliant, full of latent energy, betraying in every movement an inborn pride, tameless though kept down, and incurable as Lucifer's before his fall.

The white hands moving so deftly over the keys were strong and nervous, with large blue veins and taper fingers; such hands as denote a vigorous nature and a resolute will—such hands as strike without pity, and hold with tenacious grasp—such hands as many a lofty head has bowed its pride to kiss, and thought no shame.

Lower and lower, she bent over them while she played—softer and softer sank and swelled, and died away, the sad suggestive notes, bursting at last into a peal and crash of harmony, through which there came a short quick gasp for breath like a sob. Then she shut the pianoforte with a bang, and walked to the glass over the fire-place.

It reflected a strangely-fascinating face, so irregular of features that women sometimes called it "positively plain;" but on which the other sex felt neither better nor wiser men when they looked. The cheek-bones, chin, and jaws were prominent; the eye-brows, though arched, too thick; and for feminine beauty, the mouth too firm, in spite of its broad white teeth, and dark shade pencilled on the upper lip, in spite even of its saucy curl and bright bewildering smile.

But when she lifted her flashing eyes fringed in their long black lashes, there was no more to be said. They seemed to blaze and soften, shine and swim, all in one glance that went straight to a man's heart, and made him wince with a thrill akin to pain.

Pale women protested she had too much colour, and vowed she painted; but no cosmetics ever yet concocted could have imitated her deep rich tints, glowing like those of the black-browed beauties one sees in Southern Europe, as if the blood ran crimson beneath her skin—as if she, too, had caught warmth and vitality from their generous climate and their sunny, smiling skies. When she blushed, it was like the glory of noonday; and she blushed now, while there came a trampling of hoofs in the street, a ring at the door-bell.

The colour faded from her brow, nevertheless, before a man's step dwelt heavily on the staircase, and her visitor was ushered into the room as "General St. Josephs."

"You are early, General," said she, giving him her hand with royal condescension; "early, but welcome, and—and—— The horses will be round in five minutes—— Have you had any breakfast? I am afraid my coffee is quite cold."

General St. Josephs knew what it was to starve in the Crimea and broil in the Mutiny; had been shot at very often by guns of various calibres; had brought into discipline one of the worst-drilled regiments in the service, and was a distinguished officer, past forty years of age. What made his heart beat, and his hands turn cold? Why did the blood rush to his temples, while she gave him greeting?

"Don't hurry, pray!" said he; "I can wait as long as you like. I'd wait the whole day for you, if that was all!"

He spoke in a husky voice, as if his lips were dry. Perhaps that was the reason she seemed not to hear.

Throwing the window wide open, she looked down the street. Taking more of that thoroughfare than was convenient by advancing lengthways, with many plunges and lashings out, and whiskings of her long square tail, a black mare with a side-saddle was gradually approaching the door. The groom who led her seemed not a little relieved when he got her to stand by the kerb-stone, patting her nose and whispering many expletives suggestive of composure and docility.

This attendant, though gloved, booted, and belted for a ride, felt obviously that one such charge as he had taken in hand was enough.

He meant to fetch his own horse from the stable as soon as his mistress was in the saddle.

A staid person, out of livery, came to the door, looking up and down the street with the weary air of a man who resides chiefly in his pantry. He condescended to remark, however, that "Miss Douglas was a-comin' down, and the mare's coat had a polish on her same as if she'd been varnished."

While the groom winked in reply, Miss Douglas appeared on the pavement; and the baker, delivering loaves three doors off, turned round to wonder and approve.

"May I put you up?" said the General meekly, almost timidly.

How different the tone, and yet it was the same voice that had heretofore rung out so firm and clear in stress of mortal danger, with its stirring order—

"The Light Brigade will advance!"

"No, thank you," said Miss Douglas coldly; "Tiger Tim does the heavy business. Now, Tim—one—two—three!"

"Three" landed her lightly in the saddle, and the black mare stood like a sheep. One turn of her foot, one kick of her habit—Miss Douglas was established where she looked her best, felt her best, and liked best to be in the world.

So she patted the black mare's neck, a caress her favourite acknowledged with such a bound as might have unseated Bellerophon; and followed by Tim, on a good-looking chesnut, rode off with her admiring General to the Park.

Who *is* Miss Douglas? This was the question everybody asked, and answered too, for that matter, but not satisfactorily. Blanche Douglas—such was the misnomer of this black-browed lady—had been in London for two years, yet given no account of her antecedents, shown no vouchers for her identity. To cross-question her was not a pleasant undertaking, as certain venturous ladies found to their cost. They called her "The Black Douglas," indeed, out of spite, till a feminine wit and genius gave her the nickname of "Satanella;" and as Satanella she was henceforth known in all societies.

After that people seemed more re-assured, and discovered, or possibly invented for her, such histories as they considered satisfactory to themselves. She was the orphan, some said, of a speculative naval officer, who had married the cousin of a peer. Her father was drowned off Teneriffe; her mother died of a broken heart. The girl was brought up in a west-country school till she came of age; she had a thousand a year, and lived near South Audley Street with her aunt, a person of weak intellect, like many old women of both sexes. She was oddish herself, and rather bad style; but there was no harm in her!

This was the good-natured version. The ill-natured one was the above travestied. The father had cut his throat; the mother ran away from him, and went mad; and the west-country school was a French convent. The aunt and the thousand a year were equally fabulous. She was loud, bold, horsy, more than queer, and where the money came from that kept the little house near South Audley Street and enabled her to carry on, goodness only knew!

Still she held her own, and the old men fell in love with her. "My admirers," she told Mrs. Cullender, who told *me*, "are romantic—very, and rheumatic also, *à faire pleurer*. The combination, my dear, is touching, but exceedingly inconvenient."

Mrs. Cullender further affirms that old Buxton would have married and made her a peeress, had she but held up her finger; and declares she saw Counsellor Cramp go down on his knees to her, falling forward on his hands, however, before he could get up again, and thus finishing his declaration, as it were, on all-fours!

But she would have none of these, inclining rather to men of firmer mould, and captivating especially the gallant defenders of their country by sea and land. Admirals are all susceptible more or less, and fickle as the winds they record in their log-books. So she scarcely allowed them to count in her score; but at one time she had seven general-officers on the list, with colonels and majors in proportion.

Her last conquest was St. Josephs—a handsome man, and a proud, cold, reserved, deep-hearted, veiling under an icy demeanour a temper sensitive as a girl's. How many women would have delighted to lead such a captive up and down the Ride, and show him off as the keeper shows off his bear in its chain! How many would have paraded their sovereignty over this stern and quiet veteran, till their own hearts were gone, and they longed to change places with their victim, to serve where they had thought only to command!

In February London begins to awake out of its winter sleep. Some of the great houses have already got their blinds up, and their doorsteps cleaned. Well-known faces are hurrying about the streets, and a few equestrians spot the Ride, like early flies crawling over a window-pane. The black mare lashed out at one of these with a violence that brought his heart into the soldier's mouth, executing thereafter some half-dozen long and dangerous plunges. Miss Douglas sat perfectly still, giving the animal plenty of rein; then administered one severe cut with a stiff riding-whip, that left its mark on the smooth shining skin; and, having thus asserted herself, made much of her favourite, as if she loved it all the better for its wilfulness.

"I wish you wouldn't ride that brute!" said the General tenderly. "She'll get out of your hand some of these days, and then there'll be a smash!"

"Not ride her!" answered Miss Douglas, opening her black eyes wide. "Not ride my own beautiful pet! General, I should deserve never to get into a side-saddle again!"

"For the sake of your friends," urged the other, drawing very close with a pressure of the leg to his own horse's side; "for the sake of those who care for you; for—for—*my* sake—Miss Douglas!"

His hand was almost on the mare's neck, his head bent towards its rider. If a man of his age can look "spoony," the General was at that moment a fit subject for ridicule to every Cornet in the Service.

Laughing rather scornfully, with a turn of her wrist, she put a couple of yards between them.

"Not even for *your* sake, General, will I give up my darling. Do you think I have no heart?"

His brow clouded. He looked very stern and sad, but gulped down whatever he was going to say, and asked instead, "Why are you so fond of that mare? She's handsome enough, no doubt, and she can go fast; but still, she is not the least what I call a lady's horse."

"That's my secret," answered Miss Douglas playfully; "wouldn't you give the world to know?"

She had a very winning way, when she chose, all the more taking from its contrast to her ordinary manner. He felt its influence now.

"I believe I would give *you* the world if I had it, and not even ask for your secret in exchange," was his reply. "One more turn, Miss Douglas, I entreat you!" (for she was edging away as if for home.) "It is not near luncheon-time, and I was going to say—Miss Douglas—I was going to say——"

"Don't say it now!" she exclaimed, with a shake of her bridle that brought the mare in two bounds close to the footway. "I *must* go and speak to him! I declare she knows him again. He's got a new umbrella. There he is!"

"Who?"

"Why! Daisy!"

"D—n Daisy!" said the General, and rode moodily out of the Park.

CHAPTER III.

DAISY.

MR. WALTERS piqued himself on his *sang-froid*. If the *fractus orbis* had gone, as he would have expressed it, "to blue smash," "*impavidum ferient ruinæ*," he would have contemplated the predicament from a ludicrous rather than a perplexing point of view. Nevertheless, his eye grew brighter, and the colour deepened on his cheek, when Miss Douglas halted to lean over the rails and shake hands with him.

He was very fond of the black mare, you see, and believed firmly in her superiority to her kind.

"Oh! Daisy! I'm so glad to see you!" said Miss Douglas. "I never thought you'd be in London this open weather. I'm so much obliged to you, and you're the kindest person in the world; and—and—isn't she looking well?"

"You're *both* looking well," answered Daisy gallantly; "I thought I couldn't miss you if I walked up this side of the Row and down the other."

"Oh! Daisy! You didn't come on purpose!"

exclaimed the lady, with rather a forced laugh, and symptoms of a blush.

For answer, I am sorry to say, this young gentleman executed a solemn wink. The age of chivalry may or may not be on the wane, but woman-worshippers of to-day adopt a free-and-easy manner in expressing their adoration, little flattering to the shrines at which they bow.

"Did you really want to see me?" continued Miss Douglas; "and why couldn't you call? I'd have ridden with you this morning if I'd known you were in town."

"Got no quad," answered the laconic Daisy.

"And yet you lent me your mare!" said she. "Indeed, I can't think of keeping her; I'll return her at once. Oh! Daisy! you unselfish——"

"Unselfish what?"

"Goose!" replied the lady. "Now, when will you have her back? She's as quiet again as she used to be, and I do believe there isn't such another beauty in the world."

"That's why I gave her to *you*," answered Daisy. "It's no question of lending; she's yours, just as much as this umbrella's mine. Beauty! I should think she *was* a beauty. I don't pay compliments, or I'd say—there's a pair of you! Now, look here, Miss Douglas, I might ask you to lend her to me for a month, perhaps, if I saw my way into a real good thing. I don't think I ever told you how I came to buy that mare, or what a clipper she is!"

"Tell me *now!*" said Miss Douglas eagerly. "Let's move on; people stare so if one stops.

You can speak the truth walking, I suppose, as well as standing still!"

"It's truth I'm telling ye!" he answered, with a laugh. "I heard of that mare up in Roscommon when she was two years old. I was a year and a half trying to buy her; but I got her at last, for I'm not an impatient fellow, you know, and I never lose sight of a thing I fancy I should like."

"Watch and wait!" said the lady.

"Yes, I watched and I waited," he continued, "till at last they gave me a ride. She'd had a good deal of fun with a sort of go-cart they tried to put her in; and when I saw her I think her owner was a little out of conceit with his venture. She was very poor and starved-looking,—not half the mare she is now; but she ran away with me for nearly two miles, and I found she *could—just!* So I bargained, and jawed, and bothered, though I gave a hatful of money for her all the same. When I got her home to barracks, I had her regularly broke and bitted; but she never was easy to ride, and she never will be!"

For all comment, Miss Douglas drew the curb-rein through her fingers, while the mare bent willingly and gently to her hand.

"Oh! I know they all go pleasant with *you!*" said Daisy. "Men and horses, you've the knack of bringing them to their bridles in a day! Well, I hunted her that season in Meath and Kildare; but somehow we never dropped into a run. At last one morning, late in the season, we turned out a deer in the Dublin country, and took it in exactly twenty-seven minutes. *Then* this child knew what its plaything was made of. Didn't I, old girl?"

He patted the mare's neck, and her rider, whose eyes brightened with interest, laid hers on exactly the same spot when his hand was withdrawn.

"You found her as good as she looks," said Miss Douglas. "Oh! Daisy! in that grass country it must have felt like being in heaven!"

"I don't know about that," said the Light Dragoon; "but we were not very far off, sometimes, on the tops of those banks. However, I found nothing could touch her in jumping, or come near her for pace. Not a horse was within a mile of us for the last ten minutes; so I took her down to the Curragh—and—Miss Douglas, can you—*can* you keep a secret?"

"Of course I can," replied the lady. "What a question, Daisy; as if I wasn't much more like a man than a woman!"

His face assumed an expression of solemnity befitting the communication he had to impart. His voice sank to a whisper, and he looked stealthily around, as if fearful of being overheard.

"We tried her at seven pound against Robber-Chief, four Irish miles over a steeplechase course. She gave the Chief seven pound, her year, and a beating. Why, it makes her as good as the Lamb!"

Notwithstanding the gravity of such a topic, Miss Douglas laughed outright.

"How *like* you, Daisy, to run away with an idea! It does *not* make her as good as the Lamb, because you once told me yourself that Robber-Chief never runs kindly in a trial. You see I don't forget things. But all the same, I dare say she's as good again, the darling, and I'm sure she's twice as good-looking!"

"Now, don't you see, Miss Douglas?" proceeded Daisy, "I've been thinking you and I might do a good stroke of business if we stood in together. My idea is this. I enter her at Punchestown for the Great United Service Handicap. I send her down to be trained on the quiet at a place I know of, not fifteen miles from where we're standing now. Nobody can guess how she's bred, nor what she is. They mean to put crushing weights on the public runners. She'll be very well in, I should say, at about eleven stone ten. I'll ride her myself, for I know the course, and I'm used to that country. If we win, you must have half the stakes, and you can back her, besides, for as much as you please. What do you say to it?"

"I like the idea *immensely!*" answered Miss Douglas. "Only I don't quite understand about the weights and that—— But, Daisy, are you *sure* it isn't dangerous? I mean for *you*. I've heard of such horrible accidents at those Irish steeple-chases."

"I tell you she *can't* fall," answered this sanguine young sportsman; "and I hope I'm not likely to tumble off *her!*"

Miss Douglas hesitated. "Couldn't I——"

she said shyly; "couldn't I ride her in her gallops myself?"

He laughed; but his face clouded over the next moment.

"I ought not to have asked you," said he; "it seems so selfish to take away your favourite; but the truth is, Miss Douglas, I'm so awfully hard up that, unless I can land a good stake, it's all U—P with me!"

"Why didn't you tell me?" exclaimed Miss Douglas; "why didn't you——" Here she checked herself, and continued in rather a hard voice, "Of course, if you're in a fix, it must be got out of, with as little delay as possible. So take the mare, by all means; and another time, Daisy—— Well, another time don't be so shy of asking your friend's advice. If I'd been your brother-officer, for instance, should I have seemed such a bad person to consult?"

"By Jove, you're a trump!" he exclaimed impulsively, adding, in qualification of this outspoken sentiment, "I mean, you've so good a heart, you ought to have been a man!"

She coloured with pleasure; but her face turned very grave and sad, while she replied, "I wish I had been! Don't you know what Tennyson says? Never mind, you don't read Tennyson very often, I dare say."

"I can't make out what fellows *mean* in poetry," answered Daisy. "But I like a good song, if it's in English; and I like best of all to hear *you* play!"

"Now, what on earth has that to do with

it?" she asked impatiently. "We are talking about the mare. Send round for her to-morrow morning, and you can enter her at once. Has she got a name?"

"It used to be The Dark Ladye," he answered, smiling rather mischievously, "out of compliment to *you*. But I've changed it now."

"I ought to be very much flattered. And to what?"

"To Satanella."

She bit her lip, and tried to look vexed; but she couldn't be angry with Daisy, so laughed heartily as she waved him a good-bye, and cantered home.

CHAPTER IV.

MRS. LUSHINGTON.

WITH all her independence of spirit, it cannot be supposed that Miss Douglas went to and fro in the world of London without a chaperon. On women, an immunity from supervision, and what we may call the freedom of the city, is conferred by matrimony alone. This franchise seems irrespective of age. A virgin of fifty gathers confidence under the wing of a bride nineteen years old, shooting her arrows with the more precision that she feels so safe behind the shield of that tender, inexperienced matron. Why are these things so? Why do we dine at nightfall, go to bed at sunrise, and get up at noon? Why do we herd together in narrow staircases and inconvenient rooms at the hottest season of the year? If people bore us, why do we ask them to dinner? and suffer fools gladly, without ourselves being wise? I wonder if we shall ever know.

Blanche Douglas accordingly, with more courage, resolution, and *savoir faire*, than nine *men* out of every ten, had placed herself under the tutelage of Mrs. Francis Lushington, a lady with a convenient husband, who, like the celebrated courtier, was never *in* the way nor *out of* the way. She talked about "Frank," as she called him, every ten minutes; but somehow they were seldom seen together, except once a week at afternoon church.

That gentleman himself must either have been the steadiest of mortals, or the most cunning; his wife inclined to think him the latter.

Mrs. Lushington knew everybody, and went everywhere. There was no particular reason why she should have attained popularity; but society had taken her up, and seemed in no hurry to set her down again.

She was a little fair person, with pretty features and a soft pleading voice, very much dressed, very much painted; as good a foil as could be imagined to such a woman as Blanche Douglas.

They were sitting together in the dining-room of the latter about half-past two p.m. There never was such a lady for going out to luncheon as Mrs. Lushington. If you were asked to that pleasant meal at any house within a mile of Hyde Park Corner, it would have been a bad bet to take five to one about not meeting her. She was like a nice little luncheon herself. Not much of her; but what there was light, delicate, palatable, with a good deal of garnish.

"And which is it to be, dear?" asked this lady of her hostess, finishing her glass of sherry with considerable enjoyment. "I know I shall have to congratulate one of them soon, and to send you a wedding-present; but it's no use talking about it, till I know which——"

"Do you think it a wise thing to marry, Clara?" said the other in reply, fixing her black eyes solemnly on her friend's face.

Mrs. Lushington pondered. "There's a good deal to be said on both sides," she answered; "and I haven't quite made up my mind what I should do if I were you. With me, you know, it was different. If I hadn't made a convenience of Frank, I should have been nursing my dreadful old aunt still. You are very independent as you are, and do no end of mischief. But, my dear, you won't last for ever. That's where we fair women have the pull. And then you've so many to choose from. Yes; I think if I were *you*, I *would!*"

"And—— You'll laugh at me, Clara, I feel," said Miss Douglas. "Do you think it's a good plan to marry a man one don't care for; I mean, who rather bores one than otherwise?"

"I did, dear," was the reply; "but I don't know that I've found it answer."

"It must be dreadful to see him all day long, and have to study his fancies. Breakfast with him, perhaps, every morning at nine o'clock."

"Frank would go without breakfast often enough, if he couldn't make his own tea, and insisted on such early hours. No, dear, there are worse things than that. We have to be in the country when they want to shoot, and in the spring, too, sometimes if they're fond of hunting. But, on the other hand, we married women have certain advantages. We can keep more flirtations going at once than you. Though, to be sure, I don't fancy the General would stand much of *that!* If ever I saw a white Othello, it's St. Josephs."

"St. Josephs! Do you think I want to marry St. Josephs?"

Could the General have overheard the tone in which his name was spoken, surely his honest heart would have felt very sore and sad.

"Well, he wants to marry *you!*" was the reply; "and, upon my word, dear, the more I think of it, the more I am convinced you couldn't do better. He is rich enough, rather good-looking, and seems to know his own mind. What would you have?"

"My dear, I *couldn't!*"

"State your objections."

"Well, in the first place, he's *very* fond of me."

"That shows good taste; but it needn't stand in the way, for you may be sure it won't last."

"But it *will* last, Clara, because I cannot care for *him* in return. My dear, if you knew what a brute I feel sometimes, when he goes away, looking so proud and unhappy, without ever saying an impatient word. Then I'm sorry for him, I own; but it's no use, and I only wish he would take up with somebody else. Don't you think you could help me? Clara, *would* you mind? It's uphill work, I know; but you've plenty of others, and it wouldn't tire you as it does *me!*"

Miss Douglas looked so pitiful, and so much in earnest, that her friend laughed outright.

"I think I should like it very much," replied the latter, "though I've hardly room for another on the list. But if it's not to be the General, Blanche, we return to the previous question. Who is it?"

"I don't think I shall ever marry at all," answered the younger lady, with a smothered sigh. "If I were a man, I certainly wouldn't; and why wasn't I a man? Why can't we be independent? go where we like, do what we like, and for that matter, choose the people we like?"

"Then you *would* choose somebody?"

"I didn't say so. No, Clara; the sort of person I should fancy would be sure never to care for me. His character must be so entirely different from mine, and though they say, contrasts generally agree, black and white, after all, only make a feeble kind of grey."

"Whatever you do, dear," expostulated Mrs. Lushington, "don't go and fall in love with a boy! Of all follies on earth, that pays the worst. They are never the same two days together, and not one of them but thinks more of the horse he bought last Monday at Tattersall's, than the woman he 'spooned,' as they call it, last Saturday night at the Opera."

Miss Douglas winced.

"I cannot agree with you," said she, stooping to pick up her handkerchief; "I think men grow worse rather than better, the more they live in the world. I like people to be fresh, and earnest, and hopeful. Perhaps it is because I am none of these myself, that I rather appreciate boys."

Mrs. Lushington clapped her hands. "The very thing!" she exclaimed. "He's made on purpose for you. You ought to know Daisy!"

Miss Douglas drew herself up. "I *do* know Mr. Walters," she answered coldly; "if you mean *him*. I believe he is called Daisy in his regiment and by his very particular friends."

"You know him! and you didn't tell *me!*" replied the other gaily. "Never mind. Then, of course, you're devoted to him. I am; we all are. He's so cheery, so imperturbable, and what I like him best for is, that he has no more heart than—than—well, than I have myself. There!"

Miss Douglas was on her guard now. The appropriative faculty, strong in feminine nature as the maternal instinct, and somewhat akin to it, was fully aroused. Only in London, no doubt, would it have been possible for two such intimates to be ignorant of each other's predilections; but even here it struck Blanche there was something suspicious in her friend's astonishment, something not quite sincere in her enthusiasm and her praise.

So she became exceedingly polite and affectionate, as a fencer goes through a series of courteous salutes, while proposing to himself the honour of running his adversary through the brisket.

"You make yourself out worse than you are, Clara," said she; "it's lucky I know you so well. Indeed, you mustn't go yet. You always run away before I've said half my say. You'll be sure to come again very soon though. Promise, dear. What a love of a carriage!"

It was, indeed, a very pretty Victoria that stopped at the door,—fragile, costly, delicate, like a piece of porcelain on wheels,—and very pretty Mrs. Lushington looked therein, as she drove away.

She had turned the corner of the street some minutes before Miss Douglas left the window. Passing a mirror, that lady caught the reflection of her own face, and stopped, smiling, but not in mirth.

"They may well call you Satanella," she said; "and yet I could have been so good—so good!"

CHAPTER V.

THROUGH THE MILL.

"'SHE was iron-sinewed and satin-skinned,
Ribbed like a drum, and limbed like a deer,
Fierce as the fire, and fleet as the wind,
There was nothing she couldn't climb or clear;
Rich lords had vexed me in vain to part,
For their gold and silver, with Britomart.' *

It describes your mare exactly; and how the gifted, ill-fated author would have liked a ride on such a flyer as Satanella!"

The speaker's voice shook, and the cigar quivered between his lips while they pronounced that ill-omened name.

"She's better than common, General," was the reply. "Just look at *her crest.* They're the right sort, when they train on like that!"

General St. Josephs and Daisy Walters were standing on a breezy upland common, commanding one of the fairest landscapes in England, backed by a curtain of dusky smoke from the great metropolis, skirting two-thirds of the horizon. There was heather at their feet; and a sportsman set down in that spot from the skies might have expected to flush a black-cock rather than to hail a Hansom cab at only two hours' distance from its regular stand in Pall Mall.

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* From "The Romance of Britomart," not the least stirring of those spirited verses called "Bush Ballads and Galloping Rhymes," composed by the late A. Lindsey Gordon, and published at Melbourne, Australia, 1870.

The black mare, stripped for a gallop, stood ten yards off in the glow of a morning sun. That Daisy meant to give her "a spin" was obvious from the texture of his nether garments, and the stiff silver-mounted whip in his hand.

He had met St. Josephs the night before in the smoking-room of a military club, and, entertaining a profound respect for that veteran, had taken him into his counsels concerning the preparations and performances of the black mare. Daisy was prudent, but not cunning. The elder man's experience, he considered, might be useful, and so asked frankly for his advice.

The General cared as little for steeplechasing as for marbles or prisoners'-base, but in the present instance felt a morbid attraction towards the younger officer and his venture, because he associated the black mare with certain rides that dwelt strangely on his memory, and of which he treasured every incident with painful accuracy, sometimes almost wishing they had never been.

There is a disease from which, like smallpox, immunity can only be purchased by taking it as often as possible in its mildest form. To contract it sooner or later seems the lot of humanity, and St. Josephs had been no exception to the general rule that ordains men and women shall inflict on each other certain injuries and annoyances, none the less vexatious because flagrantly imaginary and unreal.

The General had loved in his youth, more than once it may be, with the ardour and tenacity of his character; but these follies were now things of the past. In some out-of-the way corner, perhaps, he preserved a knot of ribbon, a scrap of writing, or a photograph with its hair dressed as before the flood. He could lay his hand on such memorials, no doubt; but he never looked at them now, just as he ignored certain sights and sounds, voices, tones, perfumes, that made him wince like a finger on a raw wound. To save his life, he would not have admitted that the breath of a fresh spring morning depressed his spirits more than a sirocco; that he would rather listen to the pipes of a Highland regiment in a mess-room than to a certain strain of Donizetti, the softest, the saddest, the sweetest of that gifted composer—softer, sweeter, sadder to him that it was an echo from the past.

Among the advantages of growing old, of which there are more than people usually imagine, none is greater than the repose of mind that comes with advancing years—from fatigue, indeed, rather than satisfaction, but still repose.

It is not for the young to bask in the sun, to sit over the fire, to look forward to dinner as the pleasantest part of the day. These must be always in action, even in their dreams;

but at and after middle age comes the pleasure of the ruminating animals, the quiet comfort of content. An elderly gentleman, whose liver has outlasted his heart, is not so much to be pitied after all.

Yet must he take exceeding care not to leave go of the rock he clings to, like an oyster, that he may drift back into the fatal flood of sentiment he ought to have baffled, once for all. If he does, assuredly his last state will be worse than his first. Very sweet will be the taste of the well-remembered dram, not so intoxicating as of yore to the seasoned brain; but none the less a stimulant of the senses, a restorative for the frame. Clutching the cup to drain perennial youth, he will empty it to the dregs, till the old sot reels, and the grey hairs fall dishonoured in the dust.

If follies perpetrated for women could be counted like runs in a cricket-match, I do believe the men above forty would get the score.

"Let me see her gallop," said the General, with a wistful look at the mare, "and I will tell you what I think."

He too was a fine horseman; but he sighed to reflect he could no longer vault on horseback like Daisy, nor embody himself at once with the animal he bestrode, as did that young and supple Light Dragoon.

"I never saw a better," said the old officer to himself, as the young one, sitting close into his saddle, set the mare going at three-quarter speed. "And if she's only half as good as her rider, the Irishmen will have a job to keep the stakes on their side of the Channel this time! Ah, well. It's no use, we can't hold our own with the young ones, and I suppose we ought not to wish we could!"

The General fell into a very common mistake. We are apt to think women set a high price on the qualities we value in each other, forgetting that as their opinions are chiefly reflected from our own, it is to be talked about, no matter why, that constitutes merit in their eyes. What do they care for a light hand, a firm seat, a vigorous frame, or a keen intellect except in so far as these confer notoriety on their possessor? To be celebrated is enough. If for his virtues, well; if for his vices, better. Even the meekest of them have a strong notion of improving a sinner, and incline to the black sheep rather than all the white innocents of the fold.

In the meantime, Daisy felt thoroughly in his element, enjoying it as a duck enjoys immersion in the gutter. Free-goer as she was, the mare possessed also an elasticity rare even amongst animals of the highest class; but which, when he has once felt it, no horseman can mistrust or mistake. As Daisy tightened his hold on her head, and increased her speed, he experienced in all its force that exquisite sense of motion which, I imagine, is the peculiar pleasure enjoyed by the birds of the air.

Round the common they came, and past the

General once more, diverging from their previous direction so as to bring into the track such a fence as they would have to encounter in their Irish contest. It was a high and perpendicular bank, narrow at the top, with a grip on the taking off, and a wide ditch on the landing side. Anything but a tempting obstacle to face at great speed. Though she had gone three miles very fast, the mare seemed fresh and full of vigour, pulling, indeed, so hard that Daisy needed all his skill to control and keep her in his hand. Approaching the leap, he urged her with voice and limbs. They came at it, racing pace.

"Oh, you tailor!" muttered the General, holding his breath, in fear of a hideous fall. "I'm wrong!" he added, the next moment. "Beautifully done, and beautifully ridden!"

Even at her utmost speed, the mare sprang upright into the air, like a deer, kicked the farther face of the bank with such lightning quickness that the stroke was almost imperceptible; and, flying far beyond the ditch, seemed rather to have gained than lost ground in this interruption to her stride.

Away she went again! Over two more fences, done at the same headlong pace, round the corner of a high black hedge, down into the hollow, up the opposite rise, and so back into the straight, where Daisy, smiling pleasantly and much heightened in colour, executed an imaginary finish, with his hands down.

"I've not seen such a goer for years," observed the General, as her jockey dismounted, and two stable lads scraped a little lather from the mare. "But she seems to take a deal of riding; and I think she is almost *too* free at her fences, even for a steeple-chaser."

"I'm delighted to hear you say so," was the answer. "*That's* where we shall win. When I had her first she was rather cautious; but I hurried and bustled her till I got her temper up; she puts on the steam now as if she was going to jump into next week. I believe she'd do the great double at Punchestown in her stride!"

The older man shook his head. "She has capital forelegs," said he; "but I saw just such another break its neck last year at Lincoln. When they're so free you must catch hold like grim death; for, by Jove, if they overjump themselves at that pace, they're not much use when they get up again!"

"That *would* be hard lines," said Daisy, lighting a cigar. "It's the only good thing I ever had in my life, and it must *not* boil over. If you come to *that*, I'd rather she broke *my* neck than hers. If anything went wrong with Satanella I could never face Blanche Douglas again!"

"Blanche Douglas!" The General winced. It was not his habit to call young ladies by their Christian names; and to talk familiarly of this one seemed a desecration indeed.

"I should hope Miss Douglas will never ride that animal now," said he, looking very stiff and haughty—"throaty," Daisy called it, in describing the scene afterwards.

"Not ride her?" replied the young gentleman. "You can't know much of Satanella, General, if you suppose she wouldn't ride anything — ah, or do anything, if you only told her *not!* She's a trump of a girl, I admit; but, my eyes, she's a rum one! Why, if there wasn't a law or something against it, I'm blessed if I don't think she'd ride at Punchestown herself—boots and breeches—silk jacket —make all the running, and win as she liked! That's her form, General, you may take my word for it!"

St. Josephs positively stood aghast. Could he believe his ears? Silk jacket! Boots and breeches! And this was the woman he delighted to honour. To have annihilated his flippant young acquaintance on the spot would have given him intense satisfaction; but he was obliged to content himself with contemptuous silence and sundry glances of scorn. His displeasure, however, seemed quite lost on Daisy, who conversed freely all the way back to town, and took leave of his indignant senior with unimpaired affability when they arrived.

CHAPTER VI.

CUTTING FOR PARTNERS.

"THEN you'll—ask a man?"

"I'll ask a man."

The first speaker was Miss Douglas, the second Mrs. Lushington. These ladies, having agreed to go to the play together, the former at once secured adjoining stalls, for herself, her admirer, her friend, and her friend's admirer. Only in such little parties of four can the modern drama be appreciated or enjoyed.

Miss Douglas had long promised General St. Josephs that she would accompany him to the performance of a popular farce called *Uncle Jack*, whereof the humour consisted in an abstraction by "Boots" of a certain traveller's garments at his hotel, and consequent engagement of this denuded wayfarer to the lady of his affections. The General would have walked barefoot to Canterbury for the delight of taking Miss Douglas to the play; and, after many misfires, a night was at length fixed for that treat, of course under the supervision of a chaperon.

Like others who follow "will-o'-the-wisps," St. Josephs was getting deeper into the mire at every step. Day by day this dark bewitching woman occupied more of his thoughts, wound herself tighter round his weary heart. Now for the first time since she died he could bear to recall the memory of the blue-eyed girl he was to have married long ago. Now he felt truly thankful to have baffled the widow at Simla, and behaved like "a monster," as she said, to the foreign countess who used to ride with him in the Park.

Hitherto he was persuaded his best affections had been thrown away, all the nobility of his character wasted and misunderstood. At last he had found the four-leaved shamrock. He cared not how low he stooped to pluck it, so he might wear it in his breast.

For one of his age and standing, such an attachment has its ridiculous as well as its pitiful side. He laughed grimly in his grizzled moustache to find how particular he was growing about the freshness of his gloves and the fit of his coat. When he rode he lengthened his stirrups, and brought his horse more on its haunches. He even adopted the indispensable flower in his button-hole; but could never keep it there, because of his large circle of child-friends, to whom he denied nothing, and who regularly despoiled him of any possession that took their fancy. There was one little gipsy, a flirt, three years of age, who could, and would, have coaxed him out of a keepsake from Miss Douglas herself.

Nobody, I suppose, is insane enough to imagine a man feels happier for being in love. There were moments when St. Josephs positively hated himself, and everybody else. Moments of vexation, longing, and a bitter sense of ill-usage, akin to rage, but for the leavening of sadness that toned it down to grief. He knew from theory and practice how to manage a woman, just as he knew how to bridle and ride a horse. Alas! that each bends only to the careless ease of conscious mastery. He could have controlled the Satanella on four legs almost as well as reckless Daisy. He had no influence whatever over her namesake on two.

Most of us possess the faculty of looking on those affairs in which we are deeply interested from the outside, as it were, and with the eyes of an unbiassed spectator. Such impartial perception, however, while it increases our self-reproach, seems in no way to affect our conduct. General St. Josephs cursed himself for an old fool twenty times a day, but none the more for that did he strive or wish to put from him the folly he deplored.

It was provoking, degrading, to know that in presence of Miss Douglas he appeared at his very worst; that when he rode out with her, he was either idiotically simple, or morosely preoccupied; that when he called at her house, he could neither find topics for conversation, nor excuses to go away; that in every society, others, whom he rated as his inferiors, must have seemed infinitely pleasanter, wiser, better informed, and more agreeable; and that he, professedly a man of experience, and a man of the world, lost his head, like a raw boy, at the first word she addressed him, without succeeding in convincing her that he had lost his heart. Then he vowed to rebel—to wean himself by degrees—to break the whole thing off at once—to go out of town, leaving no address—to assert his independence, show he could live without her, and never see her again! But when she asked him to take her to the play, he said he should be delighted—and *was!*

Among the many strange functions of society, few seem more unaccountable than its tendency to select a theatre as the rendezvous of sincere affection. Of all places, there is none, I should imagine, where people are more *en evidence*—particularly in the stalls, a part of the house specially affected, it would seem, as affording no protection to front or rear. Every gesture is marked, every whisper overheard, and even if you might speak aloud, which you mustn't, during the performances, you could hardly impart to a lady tender truths or falsehoods, as the case may be, while surrounded by a mob of people who have paid money with the view of keeping eyes and ears wide open till they obtain its worth.

Nevertheless, and notwithstanding all these drawbacks to confidential communication, no sooner does a fair angler of the present day feel that, in fisherman's language, she "has got a bite," than straightway she carries her prey off to a minor theatre, where by some inexplicable method of her own, she proceeds to secure the gudgeon on its hook.

St. Josephs got himself up with extreme care on the evening in question. He was no faded *petit maître*, no wrinkled dandy, curled, padded, girthed, and tottering in polished boots towards his grave. On the contrary, he had the wisdom to grow old gracefully, as far as dress and deportment were concerned, rather advancing than putting back the hand of time. Yet to-night he *did* regret the lines on his worn face, the bald place at the crown of his head. Ten years, he thought, rather bitterly, only give him back ten years, and he could have held his own with the best of them! She might have cared for him ten years ago. Could she care for him now? Yes, surely she must, he loved her so!

"Your brougham is at the door, sir," said his servant, once a soldier, like himself; a person of calm temperament and a certain grim humour, whose private opinion it was that his master had of late been conducting himself like an old fool.

The General got into his carriage with an abstracted air, and was driven off to dine nervously and without appetite at the Senior United.

How flabby seemed the fish, how tasteless the cutlets, how insufferably prosy the conversation of an old comrade at the next table—a jovial veteran, who loved highly-seasoned stories, and could still drink the *quantum* he was pleased to call his "whack of Port." Never before had this worthy's discourse seemed so idiotic, his stomach so obtrusive, his chuckles so fatuous and inane. What did he mean by talking about "fellows of *our* age," to St. Josephs, who was seven years his junior in the Army List, and five in his baptismal register? Why couldn't he eat without wheezing, laugh without coughing, and why, oh! why could he not give a comrade greeting without slapping him on the back? St. Josephs, drinking scalding coffee before the other arrived at cheese, felt his sense of approaching relief damped by remorse for the reserve and coldness with which he treated his old, tried friend. Something whispered to him, even then, how the jolly, gormandising red face would turn to him, true and hearty, when all the love of all the women in London had faded and grown cold.

Nevertheless, at the doors of the theatre his pulses leapt with delight. So well timed was his arrival, that Mrs. Lushington and Miss Douglas were getting out of their carriage when his own stopped. Pleased, eager as a boy, he entered the house with Satanella on his arm, placing himself between that lady and her friend, while he arranged shawls, footstools, scent-bottles, and procured for them programmes of the entertainment—chary, indeed, of information, but smelling strong of musk.

Need I say that he addressed himself at first to Mrs. Lushington? or that, perceiving a vacant stall on the other side of Miss Douglas, his spirit sank within him while he wondered when and how it would be filled?

Satanella seemed tired and abstracted. "Uncle Jack's" jokes fell pointless on her ear. When St. Josephs could at last think of something to say, she bent her head kindly enough, but persistently refused to accept or understand his tender allusions, interesting herself then, and then only, in the business of the stage. In sheer self-defence, the General felt obliged to do the same.

The house roared with laughter. A celebrated low comedian was running up and down before the foot-lights in shirt and drawers. The scene represented a bedroom at an inn. The actor rang his bell, tripped over his coal-scuttle, finally upset his water-jug. Everybody went into convulsions, and St. Josephs found himself thinking of the immortal Pickwick, who "envied the facility with which the friends of Mr. Peter Magnus were amused." Turning to his tormentor, he observed the place by her side no longer vacant, and its occupant was —Daisy!

Mischievous Mrs. Lushington had "asked a man," you see, and this was the man she asked.

Captious, jealous, sensitive, because he really cared for her, St. Josephs' vexation seemed out of all proportion to its cause. He felt it would have relieved him intensely to "have it out" with Miss Douglas—to scold her, take her to task, reproach her roundly—and for what? *She* had never asked Daisy to come; *she* had not kept a seat for him at her elbow. From her flushed cheek, her bright smile, it could not but be inferred that this was an unexpected meeting—a delightful surprise.

Calm and imperturbable, Daisy settled himself as if he were sitting by his grandmother. Not till he had smoothed his moustache, buttoned his gloves, and adjusted his glasses, did he find time to inform Miss Douglas "that he knew she would be here, but did not think she could have got away from dinner so soon; that the house was hot, the stalls were uncomfortable, and this thing was not half bad fun if you'd never seen it before." The General, cursing him for "a cub," wondered she could find anything in such conversation to provoke a smile on that proud, beautiful face.

What was it she whispered behind her fan?—the fan he loved to hold because of the fragrance it seemed to breathe from *her*. He scarcely knew whether to be relieved or irritated when he overheard certain questions as to the progress of the black mare. It vexed him to think these two should have a common interest, should find it so engrossing, should talk about it so low. Why couldn't they attend to the farce they had come on purpose to see?

Mrs. Lushington, although she must have been surfeited with that unmeaning and rather tiresome admiration which such ladies find floating in abundance on the surface of London society, was yet ready at all times to accept fresh homage, add another captive to the net she dragged so diligently through smooth and troubled waters alike. Till the suggestion came from her friend, it had never occurred to her that the General was worth capturing. She began now in the usual way.

"What a number of pretty women!" she whispered. "Don't you think so, General? I haven't seen as much beauty under one roof since Lady Scavenger's ball."

Abstracted though he was, her companion had those habits of society which of all others seem to be second nature, so he answered:—

"There are only *two* pretty women in the house as far as I see; and they asked me to come to the play with them to-night."

She had a fascinating way of looking down and up again, very quick, with a glance, half shy, half funny, but altogether deadly. Even her preoccupied neighbour felt its influence, while she replied:—

"You say so because you think all women are vain, and like to be flattered, and have no heart. It only shows how little you know us. Do you mean to tell me," she added, in a lighter tone, "*that's* not a pretty girl, in the second row there, with a *mauve* ribbon through her hair?"

She *was* pretty, and he thought so; but St. Josephs, being an old soldier in more senses than one, observed sententiously:—

"Wants colouring—too pale—too sandy, and I should say freckled by daylight."

"We all know you admire dark beauties," retorted the lady, "or you wouldn't be here now."

"*You're* not a dark beauty," returned the ready General; "and I knew you were coming too."

"That '*too*' spoils it all," said she, with another of her killing glances. "Hush! you needn't say any more. If you won't talk to *her*, at least attend to the stage."

Satanella meanwhile was perusing Daisy's profile as he sat beside her, and wondering whether anybody was ever half so good-looking and so unconscious of his personal advantages. Not in the slightest degree embarrassed by this examination, Mr. Walters expressed his entire approval of the farce as it proceeded, laughing heartily at its "situations," and even nudging Miss Douglas with his elbow, that she might not miss the broadest of the fun. Was there another man in the house who could have accepted so calmly such an enviable situation? and did she like him more or less for this strange insensibility to her charms? The question must be answered by ladies who are weary of slaughter, and satiated with victory.

"Will she win, Daisy?" hazarded Miss Douglas at last, in a low whisper, such as would have vibrated through the General's whole frame, but only caused Daisy to request she would "speak up." Repeating her question, she added a tender hope that "it was all right, and that her darling (meaning the black mare) would pull him through."

"If she don't," replied Daisy, "there's no more to be said. I must leave the regiment. 'Soldier Bill' gets the troop; and I am simply chawed up."

"Oh, Daisy!" she exclaimed earnestly, "how much would it take to set you straight?"

Mr. Walters worked an imaginary sum on the gloved fingers of his right hand, carried over a balance of liabilities to his left, looked as grave as he could, and replied, briefly, "Two thou— would tide me over. It would take *three* to pull me through."

Her face fell, and the rich colour faded in her cheek. He did not notice her vexation; for the crisis of the farce had now arrived, and the stage was crowded with all its *dramatis personæ*, tumbling each other about in the intensely humorous dilemma of a hunt for the traveller's clothes; but he *did* remark how grave and sorrowful was her "good night," while she took the General's proffered arm with an alacrity extremely gratifying to that love-stricken veteran. She had never before seemed so womanly, so tender, so confiding. St. Josephs, pressing her elbow very cautiously against his beating heart, almost fancied the pressure returned. He was sure her hand clung longer than usual in his clasp when the time came to say "Good-bye."

In spite of a headache and certain angry twinges of rheumatism, this gallant officer had never felt so happy in his life.

CHAPTER VII.

"GETTING ON."

OUTSIDE the theatre the pavement was dry, the air seemed frosty, and the moon shone bright and cold. With head down, hands in pockets, and a large cigar in his mouth, Daisy meditated gravely enough on the untoward changes a lowered temperature might produce in his own fortunes. Hard ground would put a stop to Satanella's gallops, and the horses trained in Ireland — where it seldom freezes — would have an unspeakable advantage. Thinking of the black mare somehow reminded him of Miss Douglas, and, pacing thoughtfully along Pall Mall, he recalled their first meeting, tracing through many an hour of sunshine and lamplight the links that had riveted their intimacy and made them fast friends.

It was almost two years ago — though it seemed like yesterday—that, driving the regimental coach to Ascot, he had stopped his team with considerable risk at an awkward turn on the Heath, to make room for her pony-carriage ; a courtesy soon followed by an introduction in the enclosure, not without many thanks and acknowledgments from the fair charioteer and her companion. He could remember how she kept him talking till it was too late to back Judæus for the Cup, and recalled his own vexation when that gallant animal galloped freely in, to the delight of the chosen people.

He had not forgotten how she asked him to call on her in London, nor how he went riding with her in the morning, meeting her at balls and parties by night, inaugurating a pic-nic at Hampton Court for her especial benefit, while always esteeming her the nicest girl out, and the best horse-woman in the world. He would have liked her to be his sister, or his sister-in-law ; but of marrying her himself, the idea never entered Daisy's head. Thinking of her now, with her rich beauty, and her bright black hair, he neither sighed nor smiled. He was calculating how he could "put her on" for a good stake, and send her back their mutual favourite none the worse in limbs or temper for the great race he hoped to win !

All Light Dragoons are not equally susceptible, and Mr. Walters was a difficult subject, partly from his active habits of mind and body, partly from the energy with which he threw himself into the business of the moment whatever it might be.

Satanella's work, her shoeing, her food, her water, were such engrossing topics now, that, but for her connection with the mare, the lady from whom that animal took its name would have had no chance of occupying a place in his thoughts. He had got back to the probability of frost, and the possibility of making a tan-gallop, when he turned out of St. James's Street into one of those pleasant haunts where men congregate after nightfall to smoke and talk, accosting each other with the easy good-fellowship that springs from community of tastes, and generous dinners washed down with rosy wine.

Notwithstanding the time of year, a member in his shirt-sleeves was sprawling over the billiard-table, a dozen more were sprinkled about the room. Acclamations, less loud than earnest, greeted Daisy's entrance, and tumblers of cunning drinks were raised to bearded lips, in mute but hearty welcome.

"You young beggar, you've made me miss my stroke!" exclaimed the billiard-player, failing egregiously to score an obvious and easy hazard. "Daisy, you're always in the way, and you're always welcome. But what are you doing out of the Shires in such weather as this?"

"Daisy never cared a hang for *hunting*," said a tall, stout man on the sofa. "He's only one of your galloping Brummagem sportsmen, always amongst the hounds. How many couple have you scored now, this season—tell the truth, my boy—off your own bat?"

"More than *you* have of foxes, counting those that were fairly killed," answered Daisy calmly. "And that is not saying much. Seriously, Jack, something must be done about those hounds of yours. I'm told they've got so slow you have to meet at half-past ten, and never get home till after dark. I suppose if once you began to draft there would be nothing left in the kennel but the terrier!"

"You be hanged!" answered the big man, laughing. "You conceited young devil, you think you're entitled to give an opinion because you're not afraid to ride. And, after all, you can't half do that, unless the places are flagged out for you in the fences! If you cared two straws about the *real* sport, you wouldn't be in London now."

"How can I hunt without horses?" replied Daisy, burying his fair young face in an enormous beaker. "*All* hounds are not like yours, you know. Thick shoes and gaiters make a capital mount in some countries; but if I *am* to put on boots and breeches I want to go faster than a Paddy driving a pig. That's why I've never been to pay *you* a visit."

"D—n your impudence!" was all the other could find breath to retort; adding, after a pause of admiration, "What a beggar it is to chaff! But I won't let you off all the same. Come to me directly after Northampton. It's right in your way home."

"Nothing I should like better," answered Daisy; "but it can't be done. I'm due at

Punchestown on the seventeenth, and I ought to be in Ireland at least a fortnight before the races."

"At Punchestown!" exclaimed half-a-dozen voices. "There's something up! You've got a good thing, cut and dried. It's no use, Daisy! Tell us all about it!"

Walters turned from one to another with an expression of innocent surprise. He looked as if he had never heard of a steeplechase in his life.

"I don't know what you fellows call 'a good thing,'" said he. "When I drop into one I'll put you all on, you may be sure. No. I must be at Punchestown simply because I've got to ride there."

"I'm sorry for the nag," observed the billiard-player, who had finished (and lost) his game. "What is it?"

"She's a mare none of you ever heard of," answered Daisy. "They call her Satanella. She can gallop a little, I think."

"Is she going for this new handicap?" asked a shrill voice out of a cloud of tobacco smoke in the corner.

"It's her best chance, if she ever comes to the post," replied Daisy. "They're crushing weights though, and the course is over four miles."

"Back her, me boy! And I'll stand in with ye!" exclaimed an Irish peer, handsome in spite of years, jovial in spite of gout, good-hearted in spite of fashion, and good-humoured in spite of everything. "Is she an Irish-bred one? Roscommon did ye say? Ah, now, back for a monkey, and I'll go ye halves! We'll let them see how we do 't in Kildare!"

Daisy would have liked nothing better; but people do not lay "monkeys" on steeplechases at one o'clock in the morning. Nevertheless curiosity had been excited about Satanella, and his cross-examination continued.

"Is she thoroughbred?" asked a cornet of the household cavalry, whose simple creed for man and beast, or rather horse and woman, was summed up in these two articles—blood and good looks.

"Thoroughbred?" repeated Daisy thoughtfully. "Her sire is, I'm sure; and she's out of a 'Connemara mare,' as they say in Ireland, whatever that may be."

"*I know*," observed the peer, with a wink. "Ah, ye divil, ye've got your lesson perfect annyhow!"

"Do you want to back her?" asked a tall, thin man, who had hitherto kept silence, drawing at the same time a very business-like betting-book from his breast-pocket.

"You ought to lay long odds," answered Daisy. "The race will fill well. There are sure to be a lot of starters, and no end of falls. Hang it! I suppose I am bound to have something on. I'll tell you what. I'll take twelve to one in hundreds—there!"

"I'll lay you ten," said the other.

"Done!" replied Daisy. "A thousand to a hundred." And he entered it methodically in his book, looking round, pencil in mouth, to know "if anybody would do it again?"

"I'll lay you eight to one in ponies." Daisy nodded, and put down the name of the billiard-player. "And I in tens!" exclaimed another. "And I don't mind laying you seven!" screamed a shrill voice from the corner, "if you'll have it in fifties." Whereat Daisy shook his head, but accepted the offer nevertheless, ere he shut up his book, observing calmly that "he was full now, and must have something more to drink."

"And who does this mare belong to?" asked a man who had just come in. "It's a queer game, steeple-chasing, even with gentlemen up. I like to know something about owners before I back my little fancy, for or against."

"Well, she's more mine than anybody else's," answered Daisy, buttoning his overcoat to depart. "There's only one thing certain about her, and that is—she'll start if she's alive, and she'll win if she *can!*"

With these words he disappeared through the swing-doors into the empty street, walking leisurely homeward, with the contented step of one who has done a good day's work, and earned his repose.

In Piccadilly he met a drunken woman; in Curzon Street, a single policeman; by Audley Square a libertine cat darted swiftly and noiselessly across his path. Working steadily northward, he perceived another passenger on the opposite side of the way. Passing under a lamp, this figure, in spite of hat pushed down and collar pulled up, proved to be none other than St. Josephs, wrapped in a brown study, and proceeding as slowly as if it was the hottest night in June.

"Now what can *he* be up to?" thought Daisy, deeming it unnecessary to cross over at so late an hour for polite salutation. "Ought to have had his nose under the blankets long ago. It must be something *very* good to take an old duffer like that out in an east wind at two in the morning. Might have sown his wild oats by this time, one would think! Well, it's no business of mine, only I hope he wears flannel next his skin, and won't catch cold. It would almost serve him right, too, if he did!"

Sticking his hands in his pockets, Daisy shook his head in virtuous disapproval of his senior, never dreaming that a man of the General's age could be fool enough to pace a wind-swept street under a lady's window for an hour after she had retired to bed.

CHAPTER VIII.

INSATIABLE.

"MY DEAR GENERAL,

"As I know it is impossible to catch you for luncheon, come and see me at three, before I go out.

"Yours most sincerely,

"CLARA LUSHINGTON."

No date, of course. The General, nevertheless, ordered his hack at half-past two, in confident expectation of finding his correspondent at home.

He was ushered into, perhaps, the prettiest *boudoir* in London—a nest of muslin, filigree, porcelain, and exotics, with a miniature aviary in one window, a miniature aquarium in the other, a curtain over the door, and a fountain opposite the fire-place. Here he had an opportunity of admiring her taste before the fair owner appeared, examining in turn all the ornaments on her chimney-piece and writing-table, amongst which, with pardonable ostentation, a beautifully-mounted photograph of her husband was put in the most conspicuous place.

He was considering what on earth could have induced her to marry its original when the door opened for the lady in person, who appeared, fresh, smiling, and exceedingly well-dressed. Though she had kept her visitor waiting, he could not grudge the time thus spent, when he observed how successfully it had been turned to account.

"You got my note," said she, pulling a low chair for him close to the sofa on which she seated herself. "I wonder, if *you* wondered why I wanted to see you!"

The experience of St. Josephs had taught him it is well to let these lively fish run out plenty of line before they are checked, so he bowed, and said, "He hoped she had found something in which he could be of use."

"Use!" repeated the lady. "Then you want me to think you consider yourself more useful than ornamental. General, I should like to know if you are the least bit vain."

"A little, perhaps, of your taking me up," he replied, laughing; "of nothing else, I think, in the world."

She stole a glance at him from under her eyelashes, none the less effective that these had been darkened before she came down. "And yet, I am sure, you might be," she said softly, with something of a sigh.

The process, he thought, was by no means unpleasant; a man could undergo it a long time without being tired.

"Do you know I'm interested about you?"

she continued, looking frankly in his face. "For your own sake—a little; for somebody else's—a great deal. Have you never heard of flowers that 'waste their sweetness on the desert air?'"

"And blush unseen?" he replied. "I'm blushing now. Don't you think it's becoming?"

"Do be serious!" she interposed, laying a slim white hand on his sleeve. "I tell you I have your welfare at heart. That's the reason you are here now. If I cannot be happy myself, at least I like to help others. Everybody ought to marry the right person. Don't you think so? You've got a right person. Why don't you marry her?"

Watching him narrowly, she perceived, by the catch of his breath, the quiver of his eyelid, that for all his self-command her thrust had gone straight home.

His was too manly a nature to deny its allegiance. "Do you think she would have me," said he simply and frankly, "if I was to ask her?"

Mrs. Lushington never liked him better than now. To this worldly, weary, manœuvring woman there was something inexpressibly refreshing in his unaffected self-depreciation. "What a fool the girl is!" she thought; "why, she ought to *jump* at him!" But what she said, was—"*Qui cherche trouve.* If you don't put the question, how can you expect to have an answer? Are you so spoilt, my dear General, that you expect women to drop into your mouth like over-ripe fruit? What we enjoy is, to be worried and teased over and over again, till at last we are bored into saying 'Yes' in sheer weariness, and to get rid of the subject. How can you be *refused*, much more *accepted*, if you won't even make an offer?"

"Do you know what it is to care for somebody very much?" said he, smoothing his hat with his elbow, as a village-maiden on the stage plaits the hem of her apron. "What you suggest, seems the boldest game, no doubt; but it is like putting all one's fortune on a single throw. Suppose the dice come up against me?—can you wonder I am a little afraid to lift the box?"

"I cannot fancy *you* afraid of anything," she answered with an admiring glance; "not even of failure, though it would probably be a new sensation. You know what Mr. Walters says—" (he winced, and she saw it)—"'When you go to a fighting-house, you should take a fighting man.' So I say, 'When you are in a tangle about women, ask a woman to get you out of it.' Put yourself in my hands, and when you dress for dinner, you shall be a proud and a happy General!"

His face brightened. "I *should* be very happy," said he, "I honestly confess, if Miss Douglas would consent to be my wife. Do you advise me to ask her at once?"

"This very day, without losing a minute!" was the answer. "Let me have to congratulate her, when I call to drive her out at half-past five."

The General looked at the clock, smoothing his hat more vigorously than ever. "It's nearly four now," said he, in a faltering voice. "Mrs. Lushington, I am really most grateful. It's too kind of you to take such an interest in my affairs. Would you mind telling me? Women understand these things much better than men. If you were in my place, do you think I ought?—I mean what is the best plan?—In short, would you advise me to call, and ask her point-blank, or to—to write a line, you know—very explicit and respectful, of course, and tell the servant to wait for an answer?"

She was very near laughing in his face, but mastered her gravity, after a moment's reflection, and observed sententiously—

"Perhaps in your case a few lines would be best. You can write them here if you like, or at your club. The shorter the better. And," she added, shaking hands with him very kindly, while he rose to take leave, "whichever way it goes, you will let me know the result."

As the street-door closed, she opened her blotting-book, and scribbled off the following dispatch:—

"DEAREST BLANCHE,

"Alarms! A skirmish! I write to put you on your guard. The General, *your* General, has been here for an hour. He seems to have made up his mind, so prepare yourself for it at any moment. I think you *ought* to accept him. He would relapse into a quiet, kind, and respectable husband. Your own position, too, would be improved and what I call established. Don't be obstinate, there's a dear. In haste. Ever your own loving

CLARA L——.

"You mustn't forget you dine here. Nobody but ourselves, Uncle John, the two Gordon girls (Bessie has grown so pretty), and Daisy Walters, who starts for Ireland to-morrow. As soon after eight as you can."

Then she rang the bell, and sent off her note with directions for its immediate transmission. Henry must take it at once. If Miss Douglas was not at home, let him find out where she had gone, and follow her. There was no answer: only he must be quite sure she got it;—and pretty Mrs. Lushington sank back on her sofa, with the pleasing reflection that she had done what she called "a neat stroke of business, vigorous, conclusive, and compromising nobody if it was ever found out!"

She saw her way now clearly enough. On Satanella's refusal of her veteran admirer she calculated as surely as on her acceptance of an invitation to meet Daïsy at dinner, particularly with so dangerous a competitor as Bessie Gordon in the field. That last touch she considered worthy of her diplomacy. But, judging by herself, she was of opinion that Miss Douglas would so modify her negative as to retain the General in the vicinity of her charms, contemplating from day to day the fair prospect that was never to be his own. In such an ignominious state men are to be caught on the rebound, and he must ere long prove an easy victim to her kinder fascinations, take his place, submissively enough, with the other captives in the train of his conqueror. It would be very nice, she thought, to secure him, and after that she could turn her attention to Daisy; for Mrs. Lushington was never so happy as when she had succeeded in detaching a gentleman from the lady of his affections, if, in so doing, she inflicted on the latter the sorrow of a wounded spirit and the pain of a vexed heart.

Therefore had she many enemies of her own sex, ever on the watch to catch her tripping, and once down must have expected no quarter from these gentle combatants.

A generous, masculine-minded woman, who is above all petty vanities and rivalries, enjoys considerable immunity in that society, of which the laws are made by her sisters-in-arms, but they will *not* forgive the greedy, unreasonable spoiler, who eyes, covets, and abstracts the property of others—who, to use their own expressive words, "takes their men from them, while all the time she has got enough and to spare of her own!"

CHAPTER IX.

OFF AND ON.

BUT even a woman cannot calculate with certainty on what another woman will or will not do under given circumstances. The greatest generals have been defeated by unforeseen obstacles. A night's rain or a sandy road may foil the wisest strategy, destroy the nicest combinations.

Miss Douglas never came to dinner after all, and Daisy, too, was absent. Mrs. Lushington, outwardly deploring the want of a "young man" for the "Gordon girls," inwardly puzzled her brains to account for the joint desertion of her principal performers, a frightful suspicion crossing her mind that she might have been too vigorous in her measures, and so frightened Satanella into carrying Daisy off with her, *nolens volens*, once for all. She had short notes of excuse, indeed, from both; but with these she was by no means satisfied: the lady pleading headache, the gentleman a pre-engagement, since called to mind—this might mean anything. But if they *had* gone away together, she thought, never would she meddle in such matters again!

Not till dinner was over, and Bessie Gordon had sat down to sing plaintive ballads in the drawing-room, did she feel reassured; but the last post brought a few lines from the General, in fulfilment of his pledge to let her know how his wooing had sped.

"Congratulate me," he wrote, "my dear Mrs. Lushington, on having taken your advice. You were right about procrastination" (the General loved a long word, and was indeed somewhat pompous when he put pen to paper). "I am convinced that but for your kind counsels I should hardly have done justice to myself or the lady for whom I entertain so deep and lasting a regard. I feel I may now venture to hope time will do much—constant devotion, more. At some future period, perhaps not far distant, it may be my pride to present to you your beautiful young charge in a new character, as the wife of your obliged and sincere friend—V. ST. JOSEPHS."

"V. St. Josephs!" repeated Mrs. Lushington "I wonder what V. stands for. Valentine, if I remember right. And I wonder what on earth he means *me* to gather from his letter! I cannot make head or tail of it. If she has accepted him, what makes him talk about time and devotion? If she has refused him, surely he never can intend to persevere! Blanche, Blanche! if you're playing a double game, it will be the worse for you, and I'll never trust a woman with dark eyes again!"

The Gordon girls, going home in their hired brougham, voted that "dear Mrs. Lushington had one of her headaches; that Mr. L. was delightful; that, after all, it seemed very selfish of Clara not to have secured them a couple of men; finally, that they had spent a stupid evening, and would be too glad to go to bed!"

All details of love-making are probably much alike, nor is there great room for variety in the putting of that direct question, to which the path of courtship necessarily conducts its dupe. General St. Josephs kept no copy of the letter in which he solicited Miss Douglas to become his wife. That lady tore it immediately into shreds, that went fluttering up the chimney. Doubtless it was sincere and dignified, even if diffuse; worthy, too, of a more elaborate answer than the single line she scribbled in reply:—

"Come and talk it over. I am at home till seven."

His courage rose, however, now he had got fairly into action, and never had he felt less nervous, while dismounting at the well-known door, than on this supreme occasion, when he was to learn his fate, as he believed, once for all, from the lips of the woman he loved.

Like most men trained in the school of danger, strong excitement strung his nerves and cleared his vision; he no longer averted his eyes from the face that heretofore so dazzled them; on the contrary, entering the presence of Miss Douglas, he took in her form and features at a glance, as a man scans the figure of an adversary, while he prepares for attack.

It did not escape him that she looked flurried and depressed, that her hand trembled, and her colour went and came. Arguing favourably from these symptoms, he was somewhat disappointed with the first sentence she addressed to him.

"You wrote me a letter, General," said she, forcing a nervous little laugh. "Such a funny letter! I didn't quite know what to make of it!"

A funny letter! And his heart had beat, his eyes had filled, his highest, noblest feelings had been stirred with every line!

He was conscious that his bow seemed stern, even pompous, while he answered with exceeding gravity—

"Surely I made my meaning clear enough. Surely, Miss Douglas—Blanche; may I not call you *Blanche?*"

"Yes; if you like," said she impatiently. "It's a hateful name, I think. That's not my fault. Well, General, what were you going to say?"

He looked and indeed felt perplexed. "I was going to observe," said he, "that as my question was very straightforward, and very much in earnest, so all my future happiness depends on your reply."

"I wonder what there is you can see in me to like!" she retorted, with an impatient movement of her whole body, as if she was in fetters, and felt the restraint. "I'm not good enough for anybody to care for, that's the truth, General. There's hardly a girl in London who wouldn't suit you better than me."

He was looking in her face with sincere admiration. "That is not the question," he replied. "Surely I am old enough to know my own mind. Besides, you do not seem conscious of your power. You could make a bishop fall in love with you in ten minutes, if you chose!"

There came a depth of tenderness in her eyes, a smile, half sad, half sweet, about her lips, which he interpreted in his own way.

"Do you think so?" said she. "I wish I could believe you. I've not had a happy youth, and I've not been brought up in a very good school. I often tell myself I could, and ought to have been better, but somehow one's whole life seems to be a mistake!"

"A mistake I could rectify, if you would give me the right," answered St. Josephs, disheartened, but not despairing. "I only ask you to judge me fairly, to trust me honestly, and to love me some day, if you *can!*"

She gave him her hand. He drew her towards him, and pressed his lips to her cold smooth brow. No more, and yet he fancied she was his own at last. Already half pledged, already half an affianced wife. She released herself quickly, and sat down on the farther side of her work-table.

"You are very generous," she said, "and very good. I still maintain you deserve somebody far superior to me. How odd these sort of things are, and why do they never turn out as one—expects?"

She was going to say "wishes," but stopped herself in time.

He would *not* understand.

"Life is made up of hopes and disappointments," he observed. "You do not seem to hope much, Blanche. I trust, therefore, you will have less cause for disappointment. I will do all in *my* power. And now, dearest, do not call me impatient, fidgety; but when do you think I may look forward to—to making arrangements in which we are to be equally interested?"

"Oh! I don't know!" she exclaimed, with considerable emphasis. "Not yet, of course: there's plenty of time. And I'm so hurried and worried, I can hardly speak! Besides, it's very late. I promised to dine with Mrs. Lushington, and it's nearly eight o'clock now."

Even from a future help-meet, so broad a hint could not be disregarded. The General was forced to put on his gloves and prepare for departure.

"But I shall see you again soon," he pleaded. "Shall you be at the Opera—at Mrs. Cramwell's—at Belgrave House?"

"Certainly not at Belgrave House!" she answered impatiently. "I hate a crush; and that woman asks all the casuals in London. It's a regular refuge for the destitute. I'm not going there *yet*. I may, perhaps, when I'm destitute!"

There was a hard ring in her voice that distressed him, and she perceived it.

"Don't look so wretched," she added kindly. "There are places in the world besides Belgrave Square and Covent Garden. What do you say to Punchestown? It's next week, and I'm sure to be *there!*"

He turned pale, seeming no whit re-assured. "Punchestown," he repeated. "What on earth takes you to Punchestown?"

"Don't you know I've got a horse to run?" she said lightly. "I should like to see it win; and I do *not* believe they have anything in Ireland half as good as my beautiful Satanella!"

"Is that all?" he asked in a disturbed voice. "It seems such an odd reason for a lady; and it's a long journey, you know, with a horrible crossing at this time of year! Blanche—Miss Douglas, can you not stay away, as—as a favour to *me?*"

There was an angry flush on her cheek, an angry glitter in her eyes, but she kept her temper bravely, and only said in mocking accents—

"Already, General! No; if you mean to be a tyrant, you must wait till you come to the throne. I intend to show at Punchestown the first day of the races. I have made an assignation with *you*. If you like to keep it, well and good; if you like to let it alone, do! I shall not break my heart!"

He felt at a disadvantage. She seemed so cool, so unimpressionable, so devoid of the sentiment and sensibility he longed to kindle in her nature. For a moment, he could almost have wished to draw back, to resume his freedom, while there was yet time; but no, she looked so handsome, so queenly—he had rather be wretched with *her* than happy with any other woman in the world!

"Of course, I will not fail," he answered. "I would go a deal farther than Punchestown, only to be within hearing of your voice. When do you start? If Mrs. Lushington, or anybody you knew well, would accompany you, whv should we not cross over together?"

"Now, you're too exacting," she replied. "Haven't I told you we shall meet on the course, when the saddling-bell rings for the first race? Not a moment sooner, and my wish is as the law of the Medes and Persians—as yet!"

The two last words carried a powerful charm. Had he been mature in wisdom as in years, he ought never to have thought of marrying a woman who could influence him so easily.

"I shall count the days till then," he replied gallantly. "They will pass very slowly, but, as the turnspit says in the Spanish proverb, 'the largest leg of mutton must get done in time!' Good-bye, Miss Douglas. Good luck to you; and I hope Satanella will win!"

He bowed over the hand she gave him, but did not attempt to kiss it, taking his leave with a mingled deference and interest she could not but appreciate and admire. "*Why* can't I care for him?" she murmured passionately, as the street-door closed with a bang. "He's good, he's generous, he's a *gentleman!* Poor fellow, he loves me devotedly; he's by no means ugly, and he's not so *very* old! Yet I can't, I can't! And I've promised him, *almost* promised him! Well, come what may, I've got a clear week of freedom still. But what a fool I've been, and oh! what a fool I *am!*"

Then she sent her excuse to Mrs. Lushington, declined dinner at home, ordered tea, didn't drink any, and so crept sorrowful and supperless to bed.

CHAPTER X.

AT SEA.

IN the British army, notwithstanding the phases and vicissitudes to which it is subjected, discipline still remains a paramount consideration—the key-stone of its whole fabric. Come what may, the duty must be done. This is the great principle of action; and, in obedience to its law, young officers, who combine pleasure with military avocations, are continually on the move to and from head-quarters, by road, railway, or steam-boat — here to-day, gone to-morrow; proposing for themselves, indeed, many schemes of sport and pastime, but disposed of, morally and physically, by the regimental orders and the colonel's will.

Daisy, buried in Kildare, rising at day-break, going to bed at nine, looking sharply after the preparation of Satanella, could not avoid crossing the Channel for "muster," to re-cross it within twenty-four hours, that he might take part in the great race on which his fortunes now depended — to use his own expression, which was to "make him a man or a mouse."

Thus it fell out that he found himself embarking at Holyhead amongst a stream of passengers in the mid-day boat for Dublin, having caught the mail-train at Chester by a series of intricate combinations, and an implicit reliance on the veracity of Bradshaw. It rained a little, of course—it always does rain at Holyhead—and was blowing fresh from the south-west. The sea "danced," as the French say; ladies expressed a fear "it would be very rough;" their maids prepared for the worst; and a nautical-looking personage in a pea-coat with anchor buttons, who disappeared at once, to be seen no more till he landed, pale and dishevelled, in Kingstown harbour, opined first that "there was a capful of wind," secondly, that "it was a ten-knot breeze, and would hold till they made the land."

With loud throbs and pantings of her mighty heart, with a plunge, a hiss, a shower of heavy spray-drops, the magnificent steamer got under way, lurching and rolling but little, considering the weather, yet enough to render landsmen somewhat unsteady on their legs, and to exhibit the skill with which a curly-haired steward balanced himself, basin in hand, on his errands of benevolence and consolation.

Two ladies, who had travelled together in a through carriage from Euston Square, might have been seen to part company the moment they set foot on board. One of these established herself on deck, with a multiplicity of cushions, cloaks, and wrappings, to the manifest admiration of a raw youth in drab trousers and high-lows, smoking a damp cigar against the wind; while the other vanished into the ladies'-cabin, there to lay her head on a horse-hair pillow, to sigh, and moan, and shut her eyes, and long for land, perhaps to gulp, with watering mouth, short sips of brandy and water, perhaps to find the hateful mixture only made her worse.

What a situation for Blanche Douglas! How she loathed and despised the lassitude she could not fight against, the sufferings she could not keep down! How she envied Mrs. Lushington the open air, the sea-breeze, the leaping, following waves, her brightened eyes, her freshened cheeks, her keen enjoyment of a trip that, according to different organisations, seems either a purgatory or a paradise! Could she have known how her livelier friend was engaged, she would have envied her even more.

That lady, like many other delicate, fragile women of fair complexion, was unassailable by sea-sickness, and never looked nor felt so well as when on board ship in a stiff breeze.

Thoroughly mistress of the position, she yet thought it worth while, as she was the only other passenger on deck, to favour the raw youth before-mentioned with an occasional beam from her charms, and accorded him a very gracious bow in acknowledgment of the awkwardness with which he re-arranged a cushion that slid to leeward from under her feet. She was even disappointed when the roll of a cross-sea, combined with the effects of bad tobacco, necessitated his withdrawal from her presence, to return no more; and was beginning to wonder if the captain would never descend from his bridge between the paddle-boxes, when a fresh, smiling face peeped up from the cabin-door, and Daisy, as little affected by sea-sickness as herself, looking the picture of health and spirits, staggered across the deck to take his place by her side.

"*You* here, Mr. Walters!" said she. "Well, this is a surprise! Where have you been? where are you going? and how did you get on board without our seeing you?"

"I've been back for 'muster,'" answered Daisy; "I'm going to Punchestown; and I didn't know you were here, because I stayed below to have some luncheon in the cabin. How's Lushington? Have you brought him with you, or are you quite alone, on your own hook?"

"What a question!" she laughed. "I suppose you think I'm old enough and ugly enough to take care of myself! No, I'm *not* absolutely 'on my own hook,' as you call it. I've given Frank a holiday—goodness knows what mischief he won't get into!—but I've got a companion, and a very nice one, though perhaps not quite so nice as usual just at this moment."

"Then it's a lady," said Daisy, apparently but little interested in the intelligence.

"A lady," she repeated, with a searching look in his face; "and a very charming lady, too, though a bad sailor. Do you mean to say you can't guess who it is?"

"Miss Douglas, for a pony!" was his answer; and the loud, frank tones, the joyous smile, the utter absence of self-consciousness or afterthought, seemed to afford Mrs. Lushington no slight gratification.

"You would win your pony," she replied gently. "Yes. Blanche and I are going over to Ireland, partly to stay with some very pleasant people near Dublin, partly—now, I don't want to make you conceited—partly because she has set her heart on seeing you ride; and so have I."

Practice, no doubt, makes perfect. With this flattering acknowledgment, she put just the right amount of interest into her glance, let it dwell on him the right time, and averted it at the right moment.

"She's a deuced pretty woman!" thought Daisy. "How well she looks with her hair blown all about her face, and her cloak gathered up under her dear little chin!" He felt quite sorry that the Wicklow range was already looming through its rain-charged atmosphere, as they neared the Irish coast.

"I should like to win," said he, after a pause, "particularly if *you're* looking on!"

"Don't say *me*," she murmured, adding in a louder and merrier voice, "You cannot deny you're devoted to Blanche; and I dare say, if the truth were known, she has made you a jacket and cap of her own colours, worked with her own hands."

"I like her very much," he answered frankly.

"It's partly on her account I want to land this race. She's so fond of the mare, you know. Not but what I've gone a cracker on it myself; and if it don't come off, there'll be a general break-up! But I beg your pardon, I don't see why that should interest *you*."

"*Don't* you?" said she earnestly. "Then you're as blind as a bat. Everything interests me that concerns people I like."

"Does that mean you like *me?*" asked Daisy with a saucy smile, enhanced by a prolonged lurch of the steamer, and the blow of a wave on her quarter, that drenched them both in a shower of spray.

She was silent while he wrung the wet from her cloak and hood, but when he had wrapped her up once more, and re-adjusted her cushions, she looked gravely in his face.

"It's an odd question, Mr. Walters," said she, "but I'm not afraid to answer it, and I always speak the truth. Yes, I *do* like you—on Blanche's account. I think you've a pretty good head, and a very good heart, with many other qualities I admire, all of which seem rather thrown away."

Daisy was the least conceited of men, but who could resist such subtle flattery as this? For a moment he wished the Emerald Isle sunk in the sea, and no nearer termination to their voyage than the coast of Anticosti, or Newfoundland. Alas! the Hill of Howth stood high on the starboard quarter, the Wicklow mountains had risen in all their beauty of colour and majesty of outline, grand, soft, seductive, robed in russet and purple, here veiled in mist, there golden in sunshine, and streaked at intervals with faint white lines of smoke.

"I'm glad you like me," said he simply. "But how do you mean you think I'm thrown away?"

"By your leave!" growled a hoarse voice at his elbow, for at this interesting juncture the conversation was interrupted by three or four able seamen coiling a gigantic cable about the lady's feet. She was forced to abandon her position, and leave to her companion's fancy the nature of her reply. No doubt it would have been guarded, appropriate, and to the point. Daisy had nothing for it, however, but to collect her different effects, and strap them together in proper order for landing, before he ran down to fetch certain articles of his own personal property out of the cabin.

They were in smooth water now. Pale faces appeared from the different recesses opening on the saloon. People who had been sick tried to look as if they had been sleeping, and the sleepers as if they had been wide-awake all the way from Holyhead. A child who cried incessantly during the passage, now ran laughing in and out of the steward's pantry; and two sporting gentlemen from the West—one with a bright blue coat, the other with a bright red face—finished their punch at a gulp, without concluding a deal that had lasted through six tumblers, for a certain "brown harse by Elvas —an illigant-lepped wan," to use the red-faced gentleman's own words, "an' the bouldest ever ye see. Wait till I tell ye now. He's fit to carry the Lord-Liftinint himself. Show him his fence, and howld him if ye can!" As the possible purchaser for whom blue-coat acted, was a timid rider hunting in a blind country, it seemed doubtful whether so resolute an animal was likely to convey him as temperately as he might wish.

"Ah! it's the Captain," exclaimed both these sitters in a breath, as Daisy slid behind them in search of his dressing-case and his tall hat. "See now, Captain, will the mare win? Faith, she's clean-bred, I know well, for I trained her dam meself, whan she cleaned out the whole south of Ireland at Limerick for the Ladies' Plate!" exclaimed one.

"*You* ride her, Captain," added the other. "It's yerself that can do 't! They've a taste of temper, have all that breed; but you sit still, an' ride aisy, Captain. Keep her back till they come to race, and loose her off then like shot from a gun. Whew! She'll come out in wan blaze, and lave thim all behind, as I'd lave that tumbler there, more by token it's been empty this ten minutes. Ye'll take a taste of punch now, Captain, for good luck, and to drink to the black mare's chance?"

But Daisy excused himself, shaking hands repeatedly with his cordial well-wishers ere he hurried on deck to disembark.

Moving listlessly and languidly into upper air, the figure of a lady preceded him by a few steps. All he saw was the corner of a shawl, the skirt of a dress, and a foot and ankle; but that foot and ankle could only belong to Blanche Douglas, and in three bounds he was at her side. A moment before, she had been pale, languid, dejected. Now, she brightened up into all the flush and brilliancy of her usual beauty, like a fair landscape when the sun shines out from behind a cloud. Mrs. Lushington, standing opposite the companion-way, noted the change. Daisy, in happy ignorance, expressed the pleasure, which no doubt he felt, at a meeting with his handsome friend on the Irish shore.

No woman, probably, likes anything she *does* like, one whit the worse because deprived of it by force of circumstances. The fox in the fable that protested the grapes were sour, depend upon it was not a vixen. Satanella thoroughly appreciated her friend's kindness and consideration, when Mrs. Lushington condoled with her on her past sufferings, and rejoiced in her recovery, informing her at the same time that Daisy was a capital travelling companion.

"He takes such care of one, my dear." (She spoke in a very audible *aside.*) "So gentle and thoughtful; it's like having one's own maid. I enjoyed the crossing thoroughly. Poor dear! I wish you could have been on deck to enjoy it too!"

Done into plain English, the above really meant—"I have been having great fun flirting with your admirer. He's very nice, and perhaps I shall take him away from you some day when I have a chance."

By certain twinges that shot through every nerve and fibre, Blanche Douglas knew she had let her foolish heart go out of her own keeping. If she doubted previously whether or not she had fallen in love with Daisy, she was sure of it now, while wrung by these pangs of an unreasoning jealousy, that grudged his society for an hour, even to her dearest friend.

There was but little time, however, for indulgence of the emotions. Mrs. Lushington's footman, imposing, broad-breasted, and buttoned to the chin, touched his hat as a signal that he had all *his* paraphernalia ready for departure. Two ladies'-maids, limp and draggled, trotted helplessly in his footsteps. The steward, who knew everybody, had taken a respectful farewell of his most distinguished passengers, the captain had done shouting from his perch behind the funnel, and the raw youth in high-lows, casting one despairing look at Mrs. Lushington, had disappeared in the embrace of a voluminous matron the moment he set foot on shore. There was nothing left but to say good-bye.

Satanella's voice faltered, and her hand shook. How she had wasted the preceding three hours that she might have spent on deck with Daisy! and how *mean* of Clara to take advantage of her friend's indisposition by making up to him, as she did to every man she came near!

"I hadn't an idea you were going to cross with us," said she, in mournful accents, while he took his leave. "Why didn't you tell me? And when shall I see you again?"

"At Punchestown," replied Daisy cheerfully. "Wish me good luck!"

"Not till *then!*" said Miss Douglas. And having so said in Mrs. Lushington's hearing, wished she had held her tongue.

CHAPTER XI.

CORMAC'S-TOWN.

IF a *man* has reason to feel aggrieved with the conduct of his dearest friend, he avoids him persistently and sulks by himself. Should circumstances compel the unwilling pair to be together, they smoke and sulk in company. At all events, each lets the other see pretty plainly that he is disgusted and bored. Women are not so sincere. To use a naval metaphor, they hoist friendly colours when they run their guns out for action, and are never so dangerous or so determined as while manœuvring under a flag of truce.

Mrs. Lushington and Miss Douglas could no more part company than they could smoke. Till they should arrive at their joint destination, they must be inseparable as the Siamese twins, or the double-headed Nightingale. Therefore were they more than usually endearing and affectionate, therefore the car-man who drove them through Dublin, from station to station, approved heartily of their "nateral affection," as he called it, wishing, to use his own words, that he was "brother to either of them, or husband to both!"

If they sparred at all, it was with the gloves—light hitting, and only to measure each other's reach. Some day—the same idea occurred to them at the same moment—they meant to "have it out" in earnest, and it should be no child's play then. Meantime they proceeded to take their places in a fast train which seemed to have no particular hour of departure, so long was it drawn up beside the platform after the passengers had seated themselves and the doors were locked. Miss Douglas possessed good nerves, no doubt, yet were they somewhat shaken by a dialogue she overheard between guard and station-master, carried on through many shrieks and puffings of the engine at the first halt they made, a few miles down the line.

"Is the express due, Denis?"

"She is."

"Is the mail gone by?"

"She would be, but she's broke intirely."

"Is the line clear?"

"It is *not*."

"Go on, boys, an' trust in God!"

Nevertheless, in accordance with an adage which must be of Irish extraction, "Where there is no fear there is no danger," our two ladies, their two maids, and Mrs. Lushington's footman, were all deposited safely at a wayside station in the dark; the last-named functionary, a regular London servant, who had never before been ten miles from the Standard, Cornhill, arriving in the last stage of astonishment and disgust. He cheered up, however, to find a man, in a livery something like his own, waiting on the platform, with welcome news of a carriage for the ladies, a car for the luggage, and a castle not more than three miles off!

"You *must* be tired, dear," said Mrs. Lushington, sinking back among the cushions of an easy London-built brougham. "But, thank goodness, here we are at last. Three miles will soon be over on so good a road as this."

But three Irish miles, after a long journey, are not so quickly accomplished on a dark night in a carriage with one of its lamps gone out. It seemed to the ladies they had been driven at least six, when they arrived at a park wall, some ten feet high, which they skirted for a considerable distance ere they entered the demesne through a stately gateway, flanked by imposing castellated lodges on either side.

Here a pair of white breeches, and the indistinct figure of a horseman, passed the carriage-window, flitting noiselessly over the mossy sward.

"Did you see it, Blanche?" asked Mrs. Lushington, who had been in Ireland before. "It's a banshee!"

"Or a Whiteboy!" said Miss Douglas, laughing. "Only I didn't know they wore even *boots*, to say nothing of the other things!"

But the London footman, balancing himself with difficulty amongst his luggage on the outside car, was more curious, or less courageous.

"What's *that?*" he exclaimed, in the disturbed accents of one who fears a ghost only less than a highwayman.

"Which?" said the driver, tugging and flogging with all his might to raise a gallop for the avenue.

"That—that objeck!" answered the other.

"Ah! that's the masther. More power to him!" replied the car-man. "It's foxin' he'll have been likely, on the mountain, an' him nivir off the point o' the hunt. Divil thank him with the cattle he rides! Begorra! ye nivir see the masther, but ye see a great baste!"

All this was Greek to his listener, whose mind, however, became easier, with the crunching of gravel under their wheels, and the looming of a large, irregular mass of building, about which lights were flashing in all directions, showing not only that they had arrived, but that they were expected and welcome.

As Blanche Douglas stepped out of the brougham, she found her hand resting in that of the supposed banshee, who had dismounted not a minute before to receive his guests. He was a tall, handsome old gentleman, fresh-coloured and grey-haired, with that happy mixture of cordiality and good-breeding in his manner, to be found in the Emerald Isle alone; yet was there but the slightest touch of brogue on the deep mellow accents that proffered their hospitable greeting.

"You've had a long journey, Miss Douglas, and a dark drive, but glad I am to see you, and welcome you are to the Castle at Cormac's-town."

Then he conducted the ladies across a fine old hall, furnished with antlers, skins, ancient weapons, and strange implements of chase, through a spacious library and drawing-room, to a snug little chamber, where a wood-fire blazed, not without smoke, and a tea-table was drawn to the hearth. Here, excusing himself on the score of dirty boots and disordered apparel, he left the new arrivals to the care of his wife.

Lady Mary Macormac had once been as fresh and hearty an Irish lass as ever rode a four-foot wall, or danced her partners down in interminable jigs that lasted till daylight. An earl's daughter, she could bud roses, set fruit trees, milk a cow, or throw a salmon-fly with any peasant, man or woman, on her father's estate. She slept sound, woke early, took entire charge of the household, the children, the garden, the farm, anything but the stables, was as healthy as a ploughman and as brisk as a milkmaid. Now, with grown-up daughters, and sons of all ages, down to a mischievous urchin home from school, her eyes were blue, her cheeks rosy as at nineteen. Only her hair had turned perfectly white, a distinction of which she seemed rather proud, curling and crimping it with some ostentation and no little skill over her calm unwrinkled brow. To Blanche Douglas this lady took a fancy, at first sight, reserving her opinion of Mrs. Lushington for future consideration, but feeling her impulsive Irish heart warm to Satanella's rich low voice, and the saddened smile that came so rarely, but possessed so strange a charm.

"Mrs. Lushington, Miss Douglas, me daughters."

The introduction was soon over, the tea poured out, and some half-dozen ladies established round the fire to engage in that small talk which never seems to fail them, and for which the duller sex find smoking so poor a substitute.

It appeared there was a large party staying at the Castle. Not that the house was full, nor indeed could it be, since only one-half had been furnished: but there were country neighbours, who came long distances; soldiers, both horse and foot; a "Jackeen"* or two, sporting friends of Mr. Macormac; a judicial dignitary, a Roman Catholic bishop, and a cluster of London dandies.

Mrs. Lushington's eyes sparkled, like those of a sportsman who proceeds to beat a turnip field into which the adjoining stubbles have been emptied of their coveys.

"How gay you are, Lady Mary," said she, "on this side of the Channel! I am sure you have much more fun in Ireland than we have in London!"

"I think we have," answered her ladyship. "Though my experience of London was only six weeks in me father's time. I liked Paris better, when Macormac took me there, before Louisa was born. But Punchestown week, Mrs. Lushington, ye'll find Dublin as good as both."

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* Jackeen—a small squire of great pretensions.

"Sure! I'd like to go to Paris next winter, mamma," exclaimed the second girl, with a smile that lit up eyes and face into sparkling beauty. "Just you and me and papa, and let the family stay here in the Castle, to keep it warm."

"And leave your hunting, Norah!" replied her mother. "Indeed, then, I wonder to hear you!"

"Are you fond of hunting?" asked Miss Douglas, edging her chair nearer this kindred spirit.

"It's the only thing worth living for," answered Miss Norah decidedly. "Dancing's not bad, with a real good partner, if he'll hold you up without swinging you at the turns; but see, now, when you're riding your own favourite horse, and him leading the hunt, that's what I call the greatest happiness on earth!"

Mrs. Lushington stared.

"Ye're a wild girl, Norah!" said Lady Mary, shaking her handsome head. "But, indeed, it's mostly papa's fault. We've something of the savage left in us still, Miss Douglas, and even these children of mine here can't do without their hunt."

"I can feel for them," answered Satanella earnestly. "It's the one thing I care for myself. The one thing," she added rather bitterly, "that doesn't disappoint you and make you hate every thing else when it's over!"

"You're too young to speak like that," replied the elder lady kindly; "too young, and too nice-looking, if you'll excuse me for saying it"

"I don't *feel* young," replied Miss Douglas simply, "but I'm glad you think me nice."

If Lady Mary liked her guest before, she could have hugged her now.

"Ye're very pretty, my dear," she whispered, "and I make no doubt ye're as good as ye're good-looking. But that's no reason why ye would live upon air. The gentlemen are still in the dining-room. It's seldom they come out of that before eleven o'clock; but I've ordered some dinner for ye in the library, and it will be laid by the time ye get your bonnets off. Sure it's good of ye both to come so far, and I'm glad to see ye, that's the truth!"

The visitors, however, persistently declined dinner at half-past ten p.m., petitioning earnestly that they might be allowed to go to bed, a request in which they were perfectly sincere; for Blanche Douglas was really tired, while Mrs. Lushington had no idea of appearing before the claret-drinkers at a disadvantage.

To-morrow she would come down to breakfast rested, fresh, radiant, armed at all points, and confident of victory.

Lady Mary herself conducted them to their chambers, peeping into the dining-room on her way back to hear about the good run that had kept her husband out so late, and to see that he had what he liked for dinner at a side-table. Her appearance brought all the gentlemen to their feet with a shout of welcome. Her departure filled (and emptied) every glass to her health.

"Not another drop after Lady Mary," was the universal acclamation, when Macormac proposed a fresh magnum; and although he suggested drinking the same toast again, a general move was at once made to the music-room, where most of the ladies had congregated with tact and kindness, that their presence might not add to the discomfort of the strangers, arriving late for dinner to join a large party at a country-house.

With Satanella's dreams we have nothing to do. Proserpine seldom affords us the vision we most desire during the hours of sleep. Think of your sweetheart, and as likely as not you will dream of your doctor. Miss Norah helped her new friend to undress, and kissed while she bade her good night; but with morning came her own maid, looking very cross (the servants' accommodation at Cormac's-town was hardly on a par with the magnificence of the mansion), complaining first of tooth-ache from sleeping in a draught; and, secondly, with a certain tone of triumph, that the closet was damp where she had hung her lady's dresses in a row like Bluebeard's wives. The morning looked dull, rain beat against the windows, the clouds were spongy and charged with wet. It was not enlivening to have one's hair brushed by an attendant vexed with a swelled face, that constantly attracted her own attention in her lady's looking-glass.

Miss Douglas, I fear, had no more toleration than other mistresses for short-comings in an inferior. If she passed these over it was less from the forbearance of good-humour than contempt. The toilette progressed slowly, but was completed at last, and even the maid pronounced it very good. Masses of black hair coiled in thick, shining plaits, plain gold ear-rings, a broad velvet band tight round the neck, supporting a locket like a warming-pan, a cream-coloured dress, trimmed with black braid, pulled in here, puffed out there, and looped up over a stuff petticoat of neutral tint, the whole fabric supported on such a pair of Balmoral boots as Cinderella must have worn when she went out walking, formed a sufficiently fascinating picture. Catching sight of her own handsome figure in a full-length glass, her spirits rose, and Miss Douglas began to think better of her Irish expedition, persuading herself that she had crossed the Channel only to accompany her friend, and not because Daisy was going to ride at Punchestown.

She would have liked him to see her, nevertheless, she thought, now in her best looks, before she went down to breakfast, and was actually standing, lost in thought, with her hand on the door, when it was opened from without, and Mrs. Lushington entered, likewise in gorgeous apparel, fresh, smiling, beautiful in the gifts of nature as from the resources of art; to use the words of a "jackeen" who described her later in the day, "glittering in paint and varnish, like a new four-in-hand coach!"

"Who do you think is here, dear?" was her morning salutation; "of all people in the world, under this very roof? Now guess!"

"Prester John? The Archbishop of Canterbury? The great Panjandrum? How should *I* know?"

"I don't believe you *do* know. And I don't believe *he* knows. It will be rather good fun to see you meet."

"Who is it, dear?" (Impatiently.)

"Why, St. Josephs. He came yesterday morning."

Blanche's face fell.

"How *very* provoking!" she muttered; adding, in a louder voice, and with rather a forced laugh, "That man seems to be my fate! Let's go down to breakfast, dear, and get it over!"

CHAPTER XII.

ONE TOO MANY.

AT breakfast, for an old soldier, the General showed considerable want of military skill. Miss Douglas, indeed, assumed an admirable position of defence, flanked by Norah Macormac on one side, and the corner of the table on the other; but her admirer, posting himself exactly opposite, never took his eyes off her face, handed her everything he could reach, and made himself foolishly conspicuous in paying her those attentions to which ladies do not object so much as they profess. Like many other players, he lost his head when risking a large stake.

Had he cared less, he would have remembered that wisest of all maxims in dealing with others—"*Il faut se faire valoir*," and she might have appreciated his good qualities all the more, to mark the esteem in which he was held by her own sex. The General could fix a woman's attention, could even excite her interest, when he chose; and many of these laughing dames would have asked no better cavalier for the approaching races than this handsome, war-worn veteran, who "made such a fool of himself about that tall girl with black hair!"

Breakfast in a country-house is usually a protracted and elastic meal. The "jackeens," whose habits were tolerably active, came down in good time, but the London young gentlemen dropped in, one later than another, gorgeously apparelled, cool, composed, hungry, obviously proud of being up and dressed at eleven o'clock a.m.

Miss Norah whispered to Satanella that "she didn't like dandies, and dandies didn't like *her!*"

Looking in the girl's bright, handsome face, the latter proposition seemed to Miss Douglas wholly untenable.

"What sort of people *do* you like, dear?" said she, in answer to the former.

"The army," replied Miss Norah, with great animation. "And the cavalry, ye know—they're beautiful; but a man must have something besides a fine uniform to please *me*."

"What more *can* you want?" asked Blanche, with a smile.

"Well, a good seat on his horse now," laughed the other, "that's the first thing, surely, and a good temper, and a good nerve, and a pleasant smile in his face when everything goes wrong."

"You're thinking of somebody in particular," said Blanche.

"I am," answered Miss Norah boldly, though with a rising blush. "I'm thinking of somebody I should wish my brothers to be like—that I should wish to be like myself. He's never puzzled; he's never put out. Let the worst happen that will he knows what to do, and how to do it—a fair face, a brave spirit, and a kind heart!"

She raised her voice, for the subject seemed to interest her deeply. Some of the guests looked up from their breakfasts, and the General listened with a smile.

"It sounds charming," remarked Miss Douglas. "A hero—a paladin, and a very nice person into the bargain. I should like immensely to see him."

"Would ye now?" said the Irish girl. "And so ye shall, dear. He'll be at the races tomorrow. Ye'll see him ride. I'll engage he'll come to the Ladies' Stand. Say the word, and I'll introduce him to ye myself."

"Is he an Irishman?" asked Miss Douglas, amused with her animated manner and perfect good faith.

"An Irishman!" exclaimed Norah. "Did ever ye hear of Walters for an Irishman's name? They call him Daisy that know him best, though mamma says I am never to mention him only as Captain Walters."

The shot was quite unexpected, but Blanche knew the General's eye was on her, and she neither started nor winced. Scarcely even changed countenance, except that she turned a shade paler, and looked sternly in her admirer's face while he carried on the conversation.

"Not Captain Walters *yet*, Miss Macormac," said the old soldier stiffly. "First for a troop though, and one going immediately. I know him very well, but never heard so flattering an account of him before. What a thing it is to have a charming young lady for a partisan! *We* think him a good-humoured rattle enough, and he can ride, to do him justice; but surely—eh?—there's not much *in* him. Miss Douglas here sees him oftener than I do, what does *she* say?"

"A pleasant companion, quite as clever as other people, and a right good fellow!" burst out Blanche, her dark eyes flashing defiance. "That's what *she* says, General! And what's more, she always stands up for her friends, and *hates* people who abuse them!"

The General, though he opened his mouth, was stricken dumb. Norah Macormac clapped her hands, and Mrs. Lushington, looking calmly down the table, afforded the discomfited soldier a sweet and reassuring smile.

Lady Mary, reviewing her guests from behind an enormous tea-urn, judged the moment had arrived for a general move, and rose accordingly. As, late in the autumn, coveys get up all over the ground when you flush a single bird, so the whole party followed her example, and made for the door, which was opened by St. Josephs, who sought in vain a responsive glance from Miss Douglas while she passed out, with her head up, and, a sure sign she was offended, more swing than usual in the skirts of her dress. He consoled himself by resolving that, if the weather cleared, he would ask her to take a walk, and so make friends before luncheon.

Gleams of sunshine sucking up a mist that hung about the hills above the park, disclosing, like islands on a lake, clumps of trees and patches of verdure in the valley below, glittering on the surface of a wide and shallow river, that circled and broke over its rocky bed in ripples of molten gold, would have seemed favourable to his project, but that the fine weather which might enable him to walk abroad with his ladye-love was welcomed by his host for the promotion of a hundred schemes of amusement, to while away a non-hunting day after the shooting season had closed.

"It's fairing fast enough," exclaimed the cheerful old man. "We call that a bright sky in Ireland, and why not? Annyhow it's a great light to shoot a match at the pigeons; and if ye'd like to wet a line in the Dabble there, I'll engage ye'll raise a ten-pound fish before ye'd say 'Paddy Snap.'"

"I'll go bail ye will!" assented a Mr. Murphy, called by his familiars, "Mick," who made a point of agreeing with his host. "I seen them rising yesterday afternoon as thick as payse, an' me riding by without so much as a lash-whip in me hand."

Two of the party, confirmed anglers, proposed to start forthwith.

"There's a colt by Lord George I'd like ye to look at, General," continued Macormac, who would have each amuse himself in his own way. "We're training him for the hunt next season, and a finer leaper wasn't bred in Kildare. D'ye see that sunk fence now parting the flower garden from the demesne? It's not two years old he was when he broke loose from the paddock, and dashed out over it like a wild deer. There's five-and-twenty feet, bank and ditch, ye can measure it for yourself."

"Thirty, if there's wan!" assented Mr. Murphy. "An' him flyin' over it in his stride, an' niver laid an iron to the sod!"

The General, however, declined an inspection of this promising animal, on the plea that he was not much of a walker, and had letters to write.

"The post's gone out this hour and more," said his host. "But ye'd like to ride now;—of course ye would! See, Mick! Sullivan's harriers will be at the kennel as usual. Wait till I tell ye. Why wouldn't the boys get a fallow deer off the old park, and we'll raise a hunt for ye in less than an hour?"

"I'll engage they can be laid on in twenty minutes from this time," declared Mick. "Say the word, an' I'll run round to the stable, and bid Larry saddle up every beast that can stand."

"The General might ride Whiteboy," said his host, pondering, "and Norah's got her own horse, and I'll try young Orville, and ye shall take the colt yerself, Mick. We'll get a hunt, annyways!"

Mr. Murphy looked as if he would have preferred an older, or, as he termed it, "a more accomplished hunter;" but he never dreamed of disputing the master's word, and was leaving the room in haste to further all necessary arrangements, when St. Josephs stopped him on the threshold.

"You'll think me very slow," said he graciously; "but the truth is, I'm getting old and rheumatic, and altogether I feel hardly fit for the saddle to-day. Don't let me interfere with anybody's arrangements. I'll write my letters in the library, and then, perhaps, take a turn in the garden with the ladies."

Mick screwed up his droll Irish mouth into a meaning but inaudible whistle. Satisfied by the courtesy of his manner that the General was what he called "a real gentleman," it seemed impossible such a man could resist the temptations of a pigeon match, a salmon river, above all, an impromptu hunt, unless he had nobler game in view. Till the old soldier talked of "a turn in the garden with the ladies," Mr. Murphy told himself he was "bothered entirely," but now, failing any signs of disapproval on the master's face, felt he could agree, as was his custom, with the last speaker.

"Why wouldn't ye?" said he encouragingly. "An' finer pleasure-gardens ye'll not see in Ireland than Macormac's. That's for cucumbers, annyhow! An' the ladies will be proud to take a turn with ye, one and all. Divil thank them, then, when they get a convoy to their likin'!"

So the General was allowed to follow his own devices, while his host arranged diverse amusements for the other guests according to programme, with the exception of the deer hunt. By the time a fallow buck was secured the hounds had been fed, and, under any circumstances, Larry, the groom, reported so many lame horses in the stable, it would have been impossible to mount one-half of the party in a style befitting the occasion.

St. Josephs walked exultingly into the drawing-room, where he discovered Lady Mary alone, stitching a flannel petticoat for an old woman at the lodge. She thought he wanted the *Times* newspaper, and pointed to it on a writing table.

"Deserted, Lady Mary?" said this crafty hunter of dames, "even by your nearest and dearest. Left, like a good fairy, doing a work of benevolence in solitude."

"Is it the—the skirt you mean?" replied her ladyship, holding up the garment in question without the slightest diffidence. "Sure, then, I'll get it hemmed and done with this afternoon. I'd have asked Norah to help me,—the child was always quick at her needle,—but she's off to show Miss Douglas the waterfall: those two by themselves. It's as much as they'll do to be back by luncheon; though my girl's a jewel of a walker, and the other's as straight as an arrow, and as graceful as a deer."

The General's letters became all at once of vital importance. Excusing himself with extreme politeness to Lady Mary, who kept working on at the petticoat, he hastened to the library, where he did not stay two minutes, but, gliding by a side door into the hall, got his hat, and emerged on the park, with a vague hope of finding some one who would direct him to the waterfall.

The two young ladies, meanwhile, were a good Irish mile from the Castle, in an opposite direction. Norah, of course, knew a short cut through the woods, that added about a third to the distance. They walked a good pace, and exhilarated by the air, the scenery, and the sound of their own fresh young voices, skipped along the path, talking, laughing, even jeering each other, as though they had been friends from childhood.

Their conversation, as was natural, turned on the approaching races. To Norah Macormac, Punchestown constituted, perhaps, the chief gala of the year. For those two days, alas! so often rainy, she reserved her freshest gloves, her newest bonnet, her brightest glances and smiles. To the pleasure everybody experiences in witnessing the performances of a good horse, she added the feminine enjoyment of showing her own pretty self in all her native attractions, set off by dress. It was no wonder she should impart to her companion that she wouldn't give up the races even for a trip to Paris. She calculated their delights as equal to a whole month's hunting, and at least twenty balls.

Miss Douglas, too, anticipated no little excitement from the same source. Her trip across the Channel, with its concomitant discipline, a new country, wild scenery, the good humour and cordiality that surrounded her, above all, the prospect of seeing Daisy again, had raised her spirits far above their usual pitch. Her cheek glowed, her eye sparkled, her tongue ran on. She could hardly believe herself the same reserved and haughty dame who was wont to ride from Prince's Gate to Hyde Park Corner, and find nothing worthy to cost her a sigh, or win from her a smile.

"Everybody in Ireland goes there, absentees and all," said laughing Norah. "It's such fun, you can't think, with the different turn-outs, from the Lord-Lieutenant's half-dozen carriages-and-four to Mr. Murphy's outside car, with Mrs. Murphy and nine children packed all over it. She never goes anywhere else with him; but you shall see her to-morrow in all her glory. We like to be on the course early, it's so amusing to watch the arrivals, and then we get good places on the Stand."

"Can you see well from the Ladies' Stand?" asked Blanche eagerly. "I'm rather interested in one of the races. You'll think me very sporting. I've not exactly got a horse to run, but there's a mare called Satanella going to start, and I confess I want to see her win."

Norah bounded like a young roe. "Satanella!" she repeated. "Why, that's Daisy's mount! Is it to win, dear? Oh! then, if she doesn't win, or come very near it, I'll be fit to cry my eyes out, and never ask to go to a race again."

Her colour rose, her voice deepened, both gait and accent denoted the sincerity of her good wishes; and Miss Douglas, without quite admitting she had just cause for offence, felt as a dog feels when another dog is sniffing round his dinner.

"I've no doubt the mare will have justice done to her," she said severely. "He's a beautiful rider."

"A beautiful rider, and a beautiful mare entirely!" exclaimed her impulsive companion. "Now, to think he should be such a friend of yours, and me never to know it! I can't always make him out," added Miss Norah, pondering. "Sometimes he'll speak up, and sometimes he'll keep things back. You'll wonder to hear me when I tell you I haven't so much as *seen* this mare they make such a talk about!"

"I have ridden her repeatedly," observed Miss Douglas, with a considerable accession of dignity. "In fact, she is more mine than his, and I had to give him leave before he ever sent her to be trained."

"Did ye, now?" replied the other, looking somewhat disconcerted. "And does he ride often with you in London—up and down the Park, as they call it? How I'd long for a gallop in a place like that, where they never go out of a walk!"

Blanche was obliged to admit that such rides, though proposed very frequently, came off but rarely, and Norah seemed in no way dissatisfied with this confession.

"When he's here, now," she said, "if there isn't a hunt to be got, we gallop all over the country-side, him and me, the same as if we'd a fox and a pack of hounds before us. It's him that taught me the real right way to hold the bridle, and I never could manage papa's Orville horse till he showed me how. It's not likely I'd forget anything Daisy told me! Here we are at the waterfall. Come off the rock now, or ye'll not have a dry thread on ye in five minutes!"

Miss Douglas, keeping back a good deal of vexation, had the good sense to follow her guide's advice, and leaped lightly down amongst the shingle from a broad flat rock to which she had sprung, as affording a view of the cascade.

It was a fine sight, no doubt. Swelled by the spring rains, and increased by many little tributaries from the neighbouring hills, a considerable volume of water came tumbling over a ledge of bold bare rock, to roar and brawl and circle round a basin fifty feet below, not less than ten feet deep, from which it escaped in sheets of foam over certain shallows, till it was lost in a black narrow gorge, crowned by copses already budding and blooming with the first smiles of spring.

"We're mighty proud of the Dabble in these parts," observed Norah Macormac, when she had withdrawn her friend from the showers of spray that quivered in faint and changing rainbows under the sunshine. "There's not such a river for fish anywhere this side the Shannon. And where there's fish, there's mostly fishers.

See, now, Captain Walters killed one of nine pounds and a half in the bend by the dead stump there. He'd have lost him only for little Thady Brallaghan and me hurrying to fetch the gaff, and I held it while we landed the beast on the gravel below the rocks."

It was getting unbearable! Blanche had started in such good spirits, full of life and hope, enjoying the air, the scenery, the exercise; but with every word that fell from her companion's lips the landscape faded, the skies turned grey, the very turf beneath her feet seemed to have lost its elasticity. Norah Macormac could not but perceive the change: attributing it, however, to fatigue, and blaming herself severely for thus tempting a helpless London girl into an expedition beyond her strength,—anticipating, at the same time, her mother's displeasure for that which good Lady Mary would consider a breach of the laws of hospitality,—"Sure ye're tired," said she, offering to carry the other's parasol, which might have weighed a pound. "It's myself I blame, to have brought you such a walk as this, and you not used to it, may be, like us that live up here amongst the hills."

But Blanche clung to her parasol, and repudiated the notion of fatigue. "She had never enjoyed a walk so much. It was lovely scenery, and a magnificent waterfall. She had no idea there was anything so fine in Ireland. She would have gone twice the distance to see it. Tired! She wasn't a bit tired, and believed she might be quite as good a walker as Miss Macormac."

There were times when Miss Douglas felt her nickname not altogether undeserved. She became Satanella now to the core.

Luncheon was on the table when the young ladies got back to the Castle, and although several of the guests had absented themselves, the General took his place with those who remained. St. Josephs was not in the best of humours for a solitary walk in a strange district which had failed in its object. He sat, as it would seem, purposely a long way from Miss Douglas, and the servants were already clearing away before he tried to catch her eye. What he saw, or how he gathered from an instantaneous glance that his company was more welcome now than it had been at breakfast, is one of those mysteries on which it seems useless to speculate; but he never left her side again during the afternoon.

The General was true to his colours, and seldom ventured on the slightest act of disloyalty. When he returned, as in the present instance, to his allegiance, he always found himself more under authority than ever for his weak attempt at insubordination.

CHAPTER XIII.

PUNCHESTOWN.

"I TELL ye, I bred her myself, and it's every hair in her skin I know, when I kept her on the farm till she was better than three year old. Will ye not step in here, and take a dandy o' punch, Mr. Sullivan?"

The invitation was promptly accepted, and its originator, none other than the breeder of Satanella, dressed in his best clothes, with an alarming waistcoat, and an exceedingly tall hat, conducted his friend into a crowded canvas booth, on the outside of which heavy rain was beating, while its interior steamed with wet garments and hot whisky punch.

Mr. Sullivan was one of those gentlemen who are never met with but in places where there is money to be made, by the laying against, backing, buying, or selling of horses. From his exterior the uninitiated might have supposed him a land-steward, a watch-maker, or a schoolmaster in reduced circumstances; but to those versed in such matters there was something indisputably *horsey* about the tie of his neckcloth, the sit of his well-brushed hat, and the shape of his clean, weather-beaten hands. He looked like a man who could give you full particulars of the noble animal, tell you its price, its pedigree, its defects, its performances, and buy it for you on commission cheaper than you could yourself. While his friend drank in gulps that denoted considerable enjoyment, Mr. Sullivan seemed to absorb his punch insensibly and as a matter of course.

"There's been good beasts bred in Roscommon beside your black mare, Denis," observed this worthy; "and it's the pick of the world for harses comes into Kildare this day. Whisper now. Old Sir Giles offered four hundred pounds ready money for Shaneen in Dublin last night. I seen him meself!"

"Is it Shaneen?" returned Denis, with another pull at the punch. "I'll not deny he's a nate little harse, and an illegant lepper, but he wouldn't be *in* such a race as this. He'll niver see it wan, Mr. Sullivan, no more nor a Quaker'll niver see heaven! Mat should have taken the four hundred!"

"Mat knows what he's doing," said Mr. Sullivan; "the boy's been forty years and more running harses at the Curragh. May be they're keeping Shaneen to lead the Englishman over his leps; and why wouldn't he take the second money or run for a place, annyways?"

"An' where would the black mare be?" demanded her former owner. "Is it the likes of her ye'd see coming in at the tail of the hunt, and the Captain ridin' and all! I wonder to hear you then, Mr. Sullivan."

"In my opinion the race lies betwixt three," replied the great authority, looking wise and dropping his voice. "There's your own mare, Denis, that you sold the Captain; there's Leprauchan, the big chesnut they brought up here from Limerick; there's the English horse —St. George they call him—that's been trainin' all the time in Kilkenny. Wait till I tell ye. If he gets first over the big double, he'll take as much catching as a flea in an ould blanket; and when thim's all racing home together, why wouldn't little Shaneen come in and win on the post?"

Denis looked disconcerted, and finished his punch at a gulp. He had not before taken so comprehensive a view of the general contest as affecting the chance of his favourite. Pushing back the tall hat he scratched his head and pondered. "I'd be thinkin' better of it, av' the Captain wouldn't have changed the mare's name," said he. "What ailed him at 'Molly Bawn' that he'd go an' call the likes of such a baste as that Satanella? Hurry now, Mr. Sullivan, take another taste of punch, and come out of this. You and me'll go and see them saddle, annyways!"

Leaving the booth, therefore, with many "God save ye's" and greetings from acquaintances crowding in, they emerged on the course close to the Grand Stand, at a spot that commanded an excellent view of the finish, and afforded a panorama of such scenery as, in the sportsman's eye, is unequalled by any part ot the world.

The rain had cleared off. White fleecy clouds, drifting across the sky before a soft west wind, threw alternate lights and shadows over a wild expanse of country that stretched to the horizon, in range on range of undulating pastures, broken only by scattered copses, square patches of gorse, and an occasional gully, marking the course of some shallow stream from the distant uplands, coyly unveiling, as the mist that rested on their brows rolled heavily away. Far as sight could reach, the landscape was intersected by thick irregular lines, denoting those formidable fences, of which the nature was to be ascertained by inspecting the leaps that crossed the steeple-chase course. These were of a size to require great power and courage in the competing animals, while the width of the ditches from which the banks were thrown up necessitated that repetition of his effort, by which the Irish hunter gets safely over these difficulties much as a retriever jumps a gate. A very gallant horse might indeed fly the first two or three such obstacles in his stride, but the tax on his muscles would be too exhaustive for continuance, and not to "change," as it is called, on the top of the bank, when there is a ditch on each side, would be a certain downfall. With thirty such leaps and more, with a sufficient brook and a high stone wall, with four Irish miles of galloping before the Judge's Stand can be passed, with the running forced from end to end by some thorough-bred flyer not intended to *win*, and with the best steeple-chase horses in Great Britain to encounter, a conqueror at Punchestown may be said to win her laurels nobly—laurels in which, as in the wreath of many a two-legged hero, the shamrock is profusely intertwined.

"The boys has got about the Big Double as thick as payse," observed Mr. Sullivan, shading his eyes under his hat-brim while he scanned the course. "It's there the Englishman will *renage*, likely, an' if there's wan drops in there'll be forty of them tumblin' one above the other, like Brian O'Rafferty's pigs. Will the Captain keep steady now, and niver loose her off till she marks with her eye the very sod she's after kickin' with her foot?"

"I'll go bail he will!" answered Denis. "The Captain he'll draw her back smooth an' aisy on the snaffle, and when oncst he lets her drive—whooroo! begorra! it's not the police barracks nor yet the county gaol would hould her, av' she gets a fair offer! I tell ye that black mare——Whisht—will ye now? Here's the quality comin' into the Stand. There's clane-bred ones, Mr. Sullivan,—shape an' action, an' the ould blood at the back of it all."

An Irishman is no bad judge of good looks in man or beast. While the Roscommon farmer made this observation, Miss Douglas was leaving Lady Mary Macormac's carriage for the Stand. Her peculiar style of beauty, her perfect self-possession, the mingled grace and pride of her bearing, were appreciated and admired by the bystanders, as with all her triumphs they had never been on her own side of the Channel.

The crowd seemed already somewhat hoarse with shouting. Their Lord-Lieutenant, with the princely politeness of punctuality, had arrived half an hour ago. Being a hard-working Viceroy, whose relaxation chiefly consisted in riding perfectly straight over his adopted country, he was already at the back of the course, disporting himself amongst the fences to his own great content and the unbounded gratification of "the Boys." Leaping a five-foot wall, over which his aide-de-camp fell neck and crop, they set up a shout that could be heard at Naas. The Irish jump to conclusions, like women, and are as often right. That a statesman should be wise and good because he is a bold rider, seems a position hardly to be reasoned out; yet these wild untutored spirits acknowledged instinctively, that qualities by which men govern well are kept the fresher and stronger for a kindly heart to sympathise with sport as with sorrow, for a manly courage that, in work or play, trouble or danger, loves always to be in front.

So the "more powers" to his Excellency were not only loud but hearty, while for *her* Excellency, it need hardly be said of these impulsive, chivalrous, and susceptible natures, they simply went out of their senses, and yelled in a frenzy of admiration and delight.

Nevertheless, the applause was by no means exhausted, and Miss Douglas, taking her place in the Ladies' Stand, could not repress a thrill of triumph at the remark of a strapping Tipperary boy in the crowd, made quite loud enough to be overheard.

"See, now, Larry, av' ye was goin' coortin', wouldn't ye fling down your caubeen, and bid her step on to't? I'll engage there's flowers growin' wherever she lays her foot."

To which Larry replied, with a wink, "Divil a ha'porth I'd go on for the coortin'—but just stay where I am!"

Our party from Cormac's-town formed no unimportant addition to the company that thronged the Stand. Amongst these, neither Norah Macormac nor Mrs. Lushington could complain they had less than their share of admiration, while St. Josephs observed, with mingled sentiments of triumph and apprehension, that a hundred male eyes were bent on Satanella, and as many female voices whispered, "But who is the tall girl with black hair?—so handsome, and in such a peculiar style!"

A proud man, though, doubtless, was the General, walking after his young lady with her shawls, her glasses, her parasol. Choosing for her an advantageous position to view the races, obtaining for her a card of the running horses, and trying to look as if he studied it with the vaguest notion of what was likely to win.

A match had just come off between Mr. McDermott's "Comether" and Captain Conolly's "Molly Maguire," of little interest to the general public, but creating no small excitement amongst friends and partisans of the respective owners. "Molly Maguire" had been bred at Naas—within a stone's-throw, as it were. "Comether" was the pride of that well-known western hunt, once so celebrated as "The Blazers." Each animal was ridden by a good sportsman and popular representative of its particular district. The little Galway horse made all the running, took his leaps like a deer, finished like a game-cock, but was beaten by the mare's superior stride in the last struggle home, through a storm of voices, by a length.

The crowd went into ecstasies. The gentlefolks applauded with far more enthusiasm than is customary at Bedford or Lincoln. A lovely Galway girl, with eyes of that wondrous blue only to be caught from the reflection of the Atlantic, expressed an inclination to kiss the plucky little animal that had lost, and blushed like a rose when a gallant cornet entreated he might be the bearer of that reward to the horse in its stable. The clouds had cleared off, the sun shone out. The booths emptied themselves into the course. A hungry roar went up from the betting-ring, and everybody prepared for the great race of the day—"The United Service Handicap, for horses of all ages bonâ-fide the property of officers who have held Her Majesty's commission within the last ten years. Gentlemen riders. Kildare Hunt Course and rules."

Betting, alas! flourishes at every meeting, and even Punchestown is not exempt from the visits of a fraternity who support racing, it may be, after a fashion, but whose room many an Irish gentleman, no doubt, considers preferable to their company. On the present occasion they made perhaps more noise than they did business; but amongst real lovers of the sport, from the high-bred, beautifully-dressed ladies in the Stand, down to lads taking charge of farmers' horses, and "raising a lep off them" behind the booths, speculation was rife, in French gloves and Irish poplins, as in sixpenny pieces and "dandies" of punch. Man and woman each had a special fancy, shouted for it, believed in it, backed it through thick and thin.

The race had created a good deal of attention from the time it was first organised. It showed a heavy entry, the terms were fair, a large sum of money was added, public runners were heavily weighted, the nominations included many horses that had never been out before. In one way and another the United Service Handicap had grown into the great event of the meeting.

The best of friends must part. Denis could not resist the Big Double, taking up a position whence he might hurl himself at it, in imagination, with every horse that rose. Mr. Sullivan, more practical, occupied a familiar spot that commanded a view of the finish, and enabled him to test the merits of winner or loser by the stoutness with which each struggled home.

Neither had such good places as Miss Douglas and Miss Macormac. Norah knew the exact angle from which everything could best be seen. There, like an open-hearted girl, she insisted on Blanche taking her seat, and planted herself close by. The General leaned over them, and Mrs. Lushington stood on a pile of cushions behind. She had very pretty feet, and it was a pity they should be hid beneath her petticoats.

A bell rang, the course was cleared (in a very modified sense of the term), a stable-boy on an animal sheeted to its hocks and hooded to its muzzle (erroneously supposed to be the favourite) kicked his way along with considerable assurance, a friendless dog was hooted, a fat old woman jeered, and the numbers went up.

"One, two, five, seven, eight, nine, eleven, fifteen, and not another blank till you come to twenty-two. Bless me, what a field of horses!" exclaimed the General, adding, with a gallant smile, "The odd or the even numbers, ladies? Which will you have? In gloves, bonnets, or anything you please."

The girls looked at each other. "I want to back Satanella," was on the lips of both, but something checked them, and neither spoke.

Macormac, full of smiles and good-humour, in boots and breeches, out of breath, and splashed to his waist, hurried up the steps.

"See now, Norah," said he. "I've just left Sir Giles. He's fitting the snaffle himself in Leprauchan's mouth this minute, and an awkward job he makes of it, by rason of gout in the fingers. Put your money on the chesnut, Miss Douglas," he continued. "Here he comes. Look at the stride of him. He's the boy that can do't!"

While he spoke, Leprauchan, a great raking chesnut, with three white legs, came down the course like a steam-engine. No martingale that ever was buckled, even in the practised hands now steering him, could bring his head to a proper angle, but though he went star-gazing along, he never made a mistake, possessed a marvellous stride, especially in deep ground, and, to use a familiar phrase, could "stay for a week." "Hie! hie!" shouted his jockey, standing well up in his stirrups to steer him for a preliminary canter through the crowd. "Hie! hie!" repeated a dozen varying tones behind him, as flyer after flyer went shooting by—now this way, now that—carrying all the colours of the rainbow, and each looking like a winner, till succeeded by the next.

For a few minutes St. Josephs had been in earnest conversation with one of the "jackeens," who, earlier in the day, might have been seen taking counsel of Mr. Sullivan.

"I've marked your card for you, Miss Douglas," said the General. "I've the best information from my friend here, and the winner ought to be one of these four—Leprauchan, Shaneen, St. George, or Satanella. The English horse for choice, if he can keep on his legs."

"I *must* have a bet on Satanella," exclaimed Miss Douglas irrepressibly, whereat the General looked grave, and Norah gave her an approving pat on the hand. "Send somebody into the Ring, General, to find out her price, and back her for ten pounds at evens, if they can't do better, on my behalf."

"I'd like to share your wager," said Norah, kindling.

"And so you shall, dear," replied Miss Douglas. "You and I, at any rate, want him to win, poor fellow; and good wishes will do him no harm."

"Here he comes!" replied Norah; and, while she spoke, Satanella was seen trotting leisurely down the course, snorting, playing with her bit, and bending to acknowledge the caresses Daisy lavished on her beautiful neck with no sparing hand.

The mare looked as fine as a star. Trained to perfection, her skin shining like satin, her muscles salient, her ribs just visible, her action, though she trotted with rather a straight knee, stealthy, cat-like, and as if she went upon wires.

It is the first quality of a rider to adapt himself easily to every movement of the animal he bestrides, but this excellence of horsemanship is much enhanced when the pair have completed their preparation together, and the man has acquired his condition, morning after morning, in training walks and gallops on the beast. This was Daisy's case. Satanella, to a sensitive mouth, added a peculiar and irritable temper. Another hand on her rein for an hour would undo the work of days. Nobody had therefore ridden her for weeks but himself, and when the two went down the course at Punchestown together, they seemed like some skilful piece of mechanism, through which one master-spring set all parts in motion at once.

"He's an illigant rider," groaned Mr. Sullivan, who stood to win on Leprauchan. "An' 'a give-and-take' horseman's the pick of the world when there's leps. But it's not likely now they'd all stand up in such a 'rookawn,'"* he added, "an' why wouldn't the Captain get throw'd down with the rest?"

Such admiration was excited by the black mare's appearance, particularly when she broke into a gallop, and Daisy, with pardonable coxcombry, turned in his saddle to salute the ladies smiling on him from the Stand, that few but those immediately interested noticed a little shabby, wiry-looking horse come stealing behind the crack with that smooth, easy swing which racing men, though they know it so thoroughly, will sometimes neglect to their cost.

This unassuming little animal carried a plain snaffle in its mouth, without even a restraining noseband. It seemed quiet as a sheep, and docile as a dog. There was nothing remarkable about it to those who cannot take a horse in at a glance, but one of the Household left his Excellency's Stand and descended into the

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* "Rookawn," a general scrimmage.

Ring with a smile on his handsome, quiet face. When he returned, the smile was still there, and he observed he had "backed Shaneen for a pony, and had got four to one."

Mr. Sullivan, too, as he marked the little animal increase its stride, while its quick, vibrating ears caught the footfall of a horse galloping behind it, drew his mouth into many queer shapes suggestive of discomfiture, imparting to himself in a whisper, that "if he rightly knawed it, maybe Sir Giles wasn't too free with his offer at all, for such a shabby little garron as that!"

So the cracks came sweeping by in quick succession, St. George, perhaps, attracting most attention from the Stand. A magnificent bay horse of extraordinary beauty, he possessed the rich colour and commanding size of the "King Tom" blood, set off by a star of white in his forehead, and a white fore-foot. No sooner did he appear with his scarlet-clad jockey, than the ladies, to use Macormac's expression, were "in his favour to a man!" The property of a popular English nobleman, a pillar of support to all field-sports, ridden by a gentleman-jockey, capable, over that course, of giving weight to most professionals, in the prime of blood, power, and condition, he was justly a favourite with the public as with the Ring. In the whole of that multitude, there were probably but two individuals who wished he might break his neck at the first fence, and these two sat in the Ladies' Stand.

"They're all weighed and mounted now but one," observed the General, studying his card. "What is it? Fandango? Yes, Fandango; and here he comes. What a hideous drab jacket! But I say, I'll trouble you for a goer! Why this is Derby form all over!"

"He's a good mile horse anywhere," said the quiet man, who had backed Shaneen; "but he's not meant to win here, and couldn't if he tried. They've started him to make running for St. George."

"What a pretty sight!" exclaimed the ladies, as something like a score of horses, ridden by the finest horsemen in the world, stood marshalled before the Stand. Though the majority were more sedate in their demeanour than might have been expected, three or four showed a good deal of temper and anxiety to get *somewhere.* Amongst these Satanella made herself extremely conspicuous for insubordination, contrasting strikingly with little Shaneen, who stood stock-still, playing with his bit, through two false starts, till the flag was fairly down, when he darted away like a rabbit, without pulling an ounce. Win or lose, his jockey was sure of a pleasant ride on Shaneen.

"They're really off!" said the General, getting his glasses out as a young officer, extricating himself from the betting-ring, announced breathlessly—

"They have made the mare first favourite, and are laying three to two!"

"What's that in front?" said everybody.

"Fandango! Well, they *are* going a cracker! Fancy jumping at such a pace as that!"

Yet not a mistake was made at the first fence. To lookers-on from the Stand, all the horses seemed to charge it abreast, as their tails went up simultaneously, while they kicked the bank like lightning, and darted off again faster than before, but turning a little to the right; though the ground sloped in their favour, half-a-dozen were seen lengthening out in front of the rest, and it seemed as if the pace was already beginning to tell.

"Fandango still leading," said the General, scanning the race through his glasses, and thinking aloud, as people always do on such occasions. "St. George and Satanella close behind, and—yes—by Jove it is! the little mud-coloured horse, Shaneen, lying fourth. Over you go! Ah, one down—two—another? I fear that poor fellow's hurt! Look at the loose horse galloping on with them! Well done! They're *all* over the brook! St. George second! What a fine goer he is! And now they're coming to the Big Double!"

But the Big Double is so far from the Stand that we will place ourselves by the Roscommon farmer on a knoll that commands it, and watch with him the gallant sight offered by such a field of horses charging a fence like the side of a house at racing pace.

"Augh, Captain! keep steady now, for the love of the Virgin!" roared Denis, as if Daisy, a quarter of a mile off, and going like the wind, could possibly hear him. "More power to the little harse! He's leadin' them yet! Nivir say it! the Englishman has the fut of him! Ah, catch hoult of his head, ye omadawn! * He'll never see to change av' you're loosin' him off that way! Now, let the mare at it, Captain! She's doin' beautiful! An' little Shaneen, on her quarters, it's keepin' time he is like a fiddler! Ah, be aisy, you in scarlet! By the mortial, there's a lep for ye! Whooroo!!! Did ever man see the like of that!"

It was, indeed, a heavy and hideous fall. St. George—whose education in the country of his adoption had been systematically carried out—could change his footing with perfect security on the narrowest bank that was ever thrown up with a spade. To the astonishment of his own and every other jockey in the race, his "on and off" at all the preceding fences had been quick and well-timed as that of Shaneen himself; but his blood got up when he had taken the brook in his stride. He could pull hard on occasion. Ten lengths from the Big Double he was out of his rider's hand, and going as fast as he could drive. Therefore Denis desired that gentleman to "catch hoult;" but with all his skill—for never was man less "an omadawn" in the saddle—his horse had broke away, and was doing with him what it liked.

Seeing the enormous size of the obstacle

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* "You fool."

before him, St. George put on a yet more infuriated rush, and with a marvellous spring, that is talked of to this day, cleared the whole thing—broad-topped bank, double ditches, and all—in his stride, covering nearly eleven yards, by an effort that carried him fairly over from field to field: nothing but consummate horsemanship in his jockey—a tact that detects the exact moment when it is destruction to interfere—enabled the animal to perform so extraordinary a feat. But, alas! where he landed the surface was poached and trodden. His next stride brought him on his head; the succeeding one rolled him over with a broken thigh, and the gallant, generous, high-couraged St. George never rose again!

The appearance of the race was now considerably altered. Fandango dropped into the rear at once—there was nothing more for him to do in the absence of his stable-companion, and indeed he had shot his bolt ere half the distance was accomplished. The pace decreased slightly after the accident to St. George, and as they bounded over the wall, nearly together, not a man on the course doubted but that the contest lay between the first three, Satanella, Leprauchan, and Shaneen. Of these, the mare, so far as could be judged by spectators in the Stand, seemed freshest and fullest of running. Already they were laying a trifle of odds on her in the Ring.

Now Daisy had planned the whole thing out in his own mind, and hitherto all had gone exactly as he wished. In Satanella's staying powers he had implicit confidence, and he intended, from the first, that if he could have the race run to suit him, he would win it about a mile from home. After crossing the wall, therefore, he came away faster than ever, the leaps were easy, the ground inclined in his favour, and he rattled along at a pace that was telling visibly on Leprauchan, who nevertheless kept abreast of him, while little Shaneen, lying four lengths behind, neither lessened nor increased his distance from the leaders, but galloped doggedly on, in exactly the same form as when he started.

"Never saw a steeple-chase run so fast!" said everybody in the Stand. "Why, the time will be as good as the Liverpool!"

"It *can't* go on!" thought Leprauchan's jockey, feeling the chesnut beginning to roll, while pulling more than ever. "If I can but keep alongside, she *must* run herself out, and there's nothing else left in the race."

But his whip was up when they made their turn for the run-in, and he landed over his last fence with a scramble that lost him at least a length.

"Leprauchan's beat!" shouted the crowd. "Satanella wins! It's all over—it's a moral. The mare for a million! The mare! The mare!!"

Blanche Douglas turned pale as death, and Norah Macormac began to cry.

Satanella was approaching the distance with

Leprauchan beat off, and Shaneen a length behind.

Here occurred one of those casualties which no amount of care avails to prevent, nor of caution to foresee.

The crowd in their eagerness had swayed in on the course. A woman carrying a child lost her footing, and fell helpless, directly in front of the black mare.

Daisy managed to avoid them, with a wrench at the bridle that saved their lives, and lost him some twenty feet of ground. In the next three strides, Shaneen's brown muzzle was at his quarters—at his knee—at his breastplate.

Never before had Satanella felt whip or spur. These were applied to some purpose, and gamely she answered the call; nevertheless, that shabby little horse drew on her, inch by inch.

They were neck and neck now, Shaneen's jockey sitting in the middle of his saddle, perfectly still.

"It's a race!" shouted the lookers-on. "The little 'un's coming up! He's gaining on her. Not a bit of it! The mare has him safe. Keep at her, Daisy! Now, Satanella! Now, Shaneen! Did ever ye see such a fight? Neck and neck—head and head. By the powers, it's a dead heat!"

But the Judge gave it to Shaneen by a neck, and when the numbers went up, though not till then, Daisy and Daisy's backers knew that Satanella had only taken the second place.

Leprauchan and the rest came lobbing in by two and threes. Nobody cared for them. Nobody had attention to spare for anything but the shabby little brown horse that had beaten the favourite.

CHAPTER XIV.

"A GOOD THING."

POOR Daisy! Everybody was sorry for him; everybody, except the owner and a few friends who won largely on Shaneen, regretted his disappointment, and shrugged their shoulders at the heavy losses it was known to have entailed. His brother-officers looked grave, but bestirred themselves, nevertheless, for the next race. His trainer shook his head, glancing wistfully at the spur-marks on the mare's reeking sides. The very crowd condoled with him, for he had ridden to admiration, and the accident that discomfited him was patent to all. Even Mr. Sullivan, whose own hopes had been blighted by the defeat of the chesnut, expressed an opinion, that "av' it could be run again, though there wasn't a pound between them, it was his belief the mare would win!"

Mr. Walters, however, true to his nature, kept a bold face over a troubled heart, yet had a difficult task to control his feelings, when he emerged from the enclosure after weighing and found his hand seized by the Roscommon farmer in a grip that inflicted no slight physical pain.

"Ah! now, Captain," exclaimed Denis, who had flung himself on a horse, and galloped back from the Big Double, just too late to witness the finish, "sure ye rode it beautiful! An' the mare, I seen her myself, come out from them all in wan blaze, like a sky-rocket! Bate, says they, by a neck? I'll niver believe it! Annyways, ye'll need to pay the wagers. See, now, Captain, I parted a score o' heifers, only last Friday was it, by good luck, an' I've got the money here—rale Dublin notes—inside me coat-tail pocket. Take as much as ye'd be likely to want, Captain. What's a trifle like that betwigst you an' me? Oh! the mare would have wan, safe enough, av' she had fair play. See to her now, she's got her wind back. Begorra! She's ready to go again!"

Daisy was no creature of impulse—the last man in the world to be fooled by any sentiment of the moment—yet tears filled his eyes, and he could scarce find voice to thank his humble friend, while he declined an offer that came straight from the farmer's warm and generous heart.

Denis looked disappointed, wrang "the Captain's" hand hard, and vanished in a convenient booth to console himself with another "dandy" of punch.

Patting the mare fondly, and even laying his cheek against her warm, wet neck, the losing jockey retired to change silk and doeskin for his usual dress, in which, with his usual easy manner, he swaggered up to the Stand. Here, as has been said, his defeat excited considerable sympathy, and, indeed, in one quarter, positive consternation. Two young ladies had accompanied him through the race, with their hearts, as with their eyes. When his efforts ended in defeat, both were deeply affected, though in different ways. Norah Macormac could not refrain from tears, but conscious that mamma was on the watch, hid her face in a ridiculously small pocket-handkerchief, pretending to sneeze and blow her nose, as if she had caught cold. Blanche Douglas, on the contrary, looked round fierce, wistful, and defiant, like a wild creature at bay. Even Daisy, approaching jauntily to receive his friends' condolences, could not but observe how pale she was, yet how collected and composed.

"I've not punished her much," said he, addressing himself, in the first instance, to the real owner of the vanquished mare. "She's as good as I told you, Miss Douglas. It was no fault of hers. If I hadn't been a muff, I'd have killed the old woman, and won in a canter! Never mind; your favourite, at least, has not disgraced her name, and I'm very glad I called her Satanella."

She laid her hand softly on his arm, and looked straight into his eyes. "Did you stand it all?" said she. "Is it as bad as you said? Tell me! Quick! I cannot bear suspense."

"Never laid off a shilling," he answered lightly. "Never even backed her for a place. I swore I'd be a man or a mouse, as you know, and it's come up—mouse!"

"In two words, Mr. Walters, you're ruined!" She spoke almost angrily in her effort at self-control.

"That's the way to say it!" was his careless reply. "General break-up—horse, foot, and dragoons. No reason, though, you should call me *Mr. Walters.*"

"Well, *Daisy*, then," she murmured, with a loving, lingering tenderness on those syllables she was resolved never to utter above her breath again. "You know how I hoped you'd win. You know how vexed I am. You know—or rather you don't, and never *shall* know—that it's worse for *me* than for *you!*"

The last sentence she spoke so low he did not catch its purport, but thinking she regretted the loss of her own wagers, he began to express sorrow for having advised her so badly.

She stopped him angrily. "I would have backed her for thousands," she exclaimed. "I would have laid my life on her. I believe I *have!*"

"Then you don't owe the mare a grudge!" he answered cheerily. "I thought you wouldn't. She's not a pin the worse for training. You'll take her back, won't you?—and—and—you'll be kind to her for her own sake?"

She seemed to waver a moment, as if she weighed some doubtful matter in her mind.

Presently, with cleared brow, and frank, open looks, she caught his hand.

"And for *yours!*" said she. "I'll never part with her. So long as we three are above ground, Satanella—my namesake—will be a—a—remembrance between you and me!"

Then she beckoned the General, who was talking to some ladies behind her, and asked for information about the next race, with a kindness of tone and manner that elevated the old soldier to the seventh heaven.

Meanwhile, Miss Macormac had found time to recover her composure. Turning to Mr. Walters, she showed him a bright and pretty face, with just such traces of the vexation that had clouded it as are left by passing showers on an April sky. Her eyes looked deeper and darker for their late moisture, her little nose all the daintier that its transparent nostrils were tinged with pink.

She gave him her hand frankly, as though to express silent sympathy and friendship. Sinking into a seat by her side, Daisy embarked on a long and detailed account of the race, the way he had ridden it, the performances of St. George, Leprauchan, Shaneen, and his own black mare.

Though he seldom got excited, he could not but break into a glowing description, as he warmed with his narrative. "When I came to the wall," he declared, "I was as sure of winning as I am of sitting by you now. St. George had been disposed of, and he was the only horse in the race whose form I did not know to a pound. Leprauchan, I felt satisfied, could never live the pace, if I made it hot enough. And as for little Shaneen, the mare's stride would be safe to defeat *him*, if we finished with a set-to, in the run-in. Everything had come off exactly to suit me, and when we rounded the last turn but one I caught hold of Satanella, and set her going down the hill like an express-train!"

"Did ye now?" she murmured, her deep grey eyes looking earnestly into his, her sweet lips parted, as though with a breathless interest that drank in every syllable he spoke.

"*Did ye now?*" Only three words, yet carrying with them a charm to convince the most practical of men that the days of spells and witchcraft are not yet gone by. An Englishwoman would have observed, "Really!" "Oh, indeed!" "You don't say so!" or made use of some such cold conventional expression to denote languid attention, not thoroughly aroused; but the Irish girl's "*Did ye now?*" identified her at once with her companion and his doings, started them both incontinently on that path of congenial partnership, which is so seductive to the traveller, smooth, pleasant all down-hill, and leading—who knows where?

Perhaps neither deep liquid eyes, nor dark lashes, nor arched brows, nor even smiles and blushes, and shapely graceful forms, would arm these Irish ladies with such unequalled and irresistible powers, were it not for their kindly womanly nature that adapts itself so graciously to those with whom it comes in contact—their encouraging "Did ye now?" that despises no trifle, is wearied with no details, and asks only for his confidence whom they honour with their regard. Perhaps, also, it is this faculty of sympathy and assimilation, predominant in both sexes, that makes Irish society the pleasantest in the world.

Thus encouraged, Daisy went off again at score, described each fence to his eager listener, dwelt on every stride, and explained the catastrophe of the woman and child, observing, in conclusion, with a philosophy all his own, that it was "hard lines to be done just at the finish, and lose a hat-full of money by three-quarters of a yard!"

She looked up anxiously. "Did ye make such heavy bets now?" she said, in a tone of tender reproach. "Ah! Captain Walters, ye told me ye never meant to run these risks again!"

"It was for the last time," he answered rather mournfully. "If the old woman had been at home and in bed, I should have been my own master at this moment, and then—never mind what *then!* It's no use bothering about that now!"

She blushed to the very roots of her hair—why, she would have been at a loss to explain,—crumpled her race-card into a hundred creases, and observed innocently—

"Why should it make any difference now? Do ye think we'd like you better for being a hundred times a winner? I wouldn't then, for one!"

He was sitting very close, and nobody but herself heard the whisper, in which he asked—

"Then you don't despise a fellow for losing, Miss Macormac, do you?"

"Despise him?" she answered with flashing eyes. "Never say the word! If I liked him before, d'ye think I wouldn't like him ten times better after he'd been vexed by such a disappointment as that! Ye're not understanding what I mean, and maybe I'm not putting it into right words, but it seems to me—— Yes, dear mamma, I'm minding what you say! Sure enough, it is raining in here fit to drown a fish! I'm obliged to ye, Captain. Will ye kindly shift the cloak and cushions to that dry place yonder by Lady Mary. How wet the poor riders will be in their silk jackets! I'm pleased and thankful now—indeed I am—that ye're sheltered safe and dry in the Stand."

The last remark in a whisper, because of Lady Mary's supervision, who, thinking the *tête-à-tête* between Daisy and her daughter had lasted long enough, took advantage of a driving shower and the state of the roof to call pretty Miss Norah into a part of the Stand which she considered in every respect more secure.

The sky had again darkened, the afternoon promised to be wet. Punchestown weather is not proverbial for sunshine, and Mrs. Lushington, who had done less execution than she considered rightly due to a new toilette of violet and swan s-down, voted the whole thing a failure and a bore. The last race was run off in a pelting shower, the Lord-Lieutenant's carriages and escort had departed, people gathered up their shawls and wrappings with little interest in anything but the preservation of dry skins. Ladies yawned and began to look tired, gentlemen picked their way through the course ankle-deep in mud to order up their several vehicles, horse and foot scattered themselves over the country in every direction from a common centre, the canvas-booths flapped, the wind blew, the rain fell, the great day's racing was over, and it was time to go home.

Norah Macormac's ears were very sharp, but they listened in vain for the expected invitation from Lady Mary, asking Daisy to spend a few days with them at the Castle. Papa, whose hospitality was unbounded and uncontrollable, would have taken no denial under any circumstances; but papa was engaged with the race committee, and intended, moreover, to gallop home across country by himself. There seemed nothing for it but to put as much cordiality into her farewell as was compatible with the presence of bystanders and the usages of society.

Miss Norah no doubt acquitted herself to Daisy's satisfaction—and her own.

Mr. Sullivan, whose experience enabled him to recover his losses on the great handicap by a judicious selection of winners in two succeeding races, did not, therefore, depart without a final glass of comfort, which he swallowed in company with the Roscommon farmer. To him he expounded his views on steeple-chasing, and horses in general, at far greater length than in the forenoon. It is matter of regret that, owing to excitement, vexation, and very strong punch, Denis should have been much too drunk to understand a word he said. The only idea this worthy seemed clearly to take in, he repeated over and over again in varying tones of grief and astonishment, but always in the same terms:—

"The mare can do it, I tell ye! an' the Captain rode her beau-tiful! Isn't it strange, now, to see little Shaneen comin' in like that at the finish, an' givin' her a batin' by a neck!"

CHAPTER XV.

WINNERS AND LOSERS.

DINNER that day at the Castle seemed less lively than usual. Macormac, indeed, whose joviality was invincible, ate, drank, laughed, and talked for a dozen; but Lady Mary's spirits were obviously depressed; and the guests, perhaps not without private vexations of their own, took their cue rather from hostess than host. An unaccountable sense of gloom and disappointment pervaded the whole party. The General, having come down early, in hopes of a few minutes with Miss Douglas in the drawing-room before the others were dressed, had been disappointed by the protracted toilet and tardy appearance of that provoking young lady, with whom he parted an hour before on terms of mutual sympathy and tenderness, but who now sat pale and silent, while the thunder-clouds he knew and dreaded gathered ominously on her brow. His preoccupation necessarily affected his neighbour—a budding beauty fresh from the schoolroom, full of fun and good-humour, that her sense of propriety kept down, unless judiciously encouraged and drawn out. Most of the gentlemen had been wet to the skin, many had lost money, all were tired, and Norah Macormac's eyes filled every now and then with tears. These discoveries Mrs. Lushington imparted in a whisper to Lord St. Abbs as he sat between herself and her hostess, whom he had taken in to dinner, pausing thereafter to mark the effect of her condescension on this raw youth, lately launched into the great world. The young nobleman, however, betrayed no symptoms of emotion beyond screwing his eye-glass tighter in its place, and turning round to look straight in her face, while it dropped out with a jump. Even Mrs. Lushington felt at a disadvantage, and took counsel with her own heart whether she should accost him again.

Why Lord St. Abbs went about at all, or what pleasure he derived from the society of his fellow-creatures, was a puzzle nobody had yet been able to find out. Pale, thin, and puny in person, freckled, sandy-haired, bearing all outward characteristics of Scottish extraction, except the Caledonian's gaunt and stalwart frame, he neither rode, shot, fished, sang, made jokes, nor played whist. He drank very little, conversed not at all, and was voted by nearly all who had the advantage of his acquaintance "the dullest young man out!"

Yet was he to be seen everywhere, from Buckingham Palace or Holland House to Hampton races and the fireworks at Cremorne; always alone, always silent, with his glass in his eye, observant, imperturbable, and thinking, no doubt, a great deal.

It was rumoured, indeed, that on one memorable occasion he got drunk at Cambridge, and kept a supper-party in roars of laughter till four a.m. If so, he must have fired all his jokes off at once, so to speak, and blown the magazine up afterwards; for he never blazed forth in such lustre again. He came out a wrangler of his year, notwithstanding, and the best modern linguist, as well as classical scholar, in the University. Though the world of ball-goers and diners-out ignores such distinctions, a strong political party, hungering for office, had its eye on him already. As his father voted for Government in the Upper House, a provident director of the Opposition lost no time in sounding him on his views, should he become a member of the Lower. How little, to use his own words, the *whip* "took by his motion" may be gathered from the opinion he expressed in confidence to his chief, that "St. Abbs was either as close as wax or the biggest fool (and it's saying a great deal) who ever came out of Cambridge with a degree!"

Gloomy as a dinner-party may appear at first, if the champagne circulates freely people begin to talk long before the repast is half over. What must children think of their seniors when the dining-room door opens for an instant, and trailing up-stairs unwillingly to bed, they linger to catch that discordant, unintelligible gabble going on within? During a lull Mrs. Lushington made one more effort to arouse the attention of Lord St. Abbs.

"We're all getting better by degrees," said she, with a comic little sigh. "But it has been a disastrous day, and I believe everybody feels just as I do myself."

"How?" demanded his lordship, while the eye-glass bounced into his plate.

"Like the man who won a shilling and lost eighteenpence," she answered, laughing.

"Why?" he asked, yet more austerely, screwing the instrument into position the while, with a defiant scowl.

She was out of patience—no wonder.

"Good gracious, Lord St. Abbs!" said she. "Haven't we all been on the wrong horse? Haven't we all been backing Daisy?"

She spoke rather loud, and was amused to observe the effect of her observation. It was like dropping a squib in a boy's school during lessons. Everybody must needs join in the excitement.

"A bad job, indeed!" said one.

"A great race entirely!" added another. "Run fairly out from end to end, and only a neck between first and second at the finish!"

"I wish I'd taken old Sullivan's advice," moaned a third; "or backed the mare for a place, annyhow."

"Ye might have been wrong even then, me boy," interrupted a jolly, red-faced gentleman, "unless ye squared the ould woman! I wonder would she take three half-crowns a day to come with me twice a year to the Curragh?"

"I knew of the mare's trial," drawled one of the London dandies, "and backed her to win me a monkey. Daisy put me on at once, like a trump. It was a real good thing—and it has boiled over. (Champagne, please.) Such is life, Miss Douglas. We have no hope of getting home now till Epsom Spring."

Miss Douglas, not the least to his discomfiture, stared him scornfully in the face without reply.

"I'm afraid it's a severe blow to young Walters," observed the General. "They tell me he has lost a good deal more than he can afford."

"Got it, I fancy, very hot!" said the dandy. "Gad, he rode as if he'd backed his mount. I thought his finish one of the best I ever saw."

Norah Macormac threw him the sweetest of glances, and wondered why she had considered him so very uninteresting till now.

"They say he hasn't a shilling left," continued the General, but stopped short when he caught the flash of Satanella's eye, under its dark, frowning brow.

"I dare say he'll pull through," said she bitterly, "and disappoint his dearest friends, after all."

"I'll engage he will, Miss Douglas!" exclaimed Macormac's hearty voice from the end of the table. "It's yourself wouldn't turn your back on a friend, lose or win. Take a glass of that claret, now. It'll not hurt ye. Here's the boy's health, and good luck to him! A pleasanter fellow, to my mind, never emptied a bottle, and a better rider never sat in a saddle than he's proved himself this day!"

Norah would have liked to jump up and hug papa's handsome white head in her embrace on the spot, but Lady Mary had been watching the girl to-night with a mother's anxiety, and fearful lest her daughter should betray herself if subjected to further trial, gave the signal rather prematurely for the ladies to withdraw.

While they trooped gracefully out, the gentlemen were still discussing Daisy's defeat, and the catastrophe of the Great United Service Handicap.

Everybody knows what men talk about when left alone after dinner; but none, at least of the rougher sex, can venture to guess the topics with which ladies beguile their seclusion in the drawing-room. Whatever these might be, it seems they had little interest for Mrs. Lushington, whose habit it was to retire for ten minutes or so to her own chamber, there, perhaps, to revise and refresh her charms ere she descended once more upon a world of victims.

Her bedroom was gorgeously furnished, supplied with all the luxuries to which she was accustomed; but the windows did not shut close, and a draught beneath the door lifted the hearth-rug at her fire-place, therefore she made but a short stay in her apartment, stealing softly down-stairs again, so as to be well settled in the drawing-room before the gentlemen came in.

Traversing the library, she heard Lady Mary's voice carrying on, as it seemed, a subdued, yet sustained conversation, in a little recess adjoining, which could hardly be called a boudoir, but was so far habitable, that in it there usually stood a lamp, a chess-board, and a card-table. Mrs. Lushington would not have *listened*, be sure, to save her life, but the *Dublin Evening Mail* lay close at hand on a writing-table. She became suddenly interested in a Tipperary election, and the price of pigs at Belfast.

Lady Mary's accents were low, grave, even sorrowful. It was difficult to catch more than a sentence here and there; but, judging by the short, quick sobs that replied to these, they seemed to produce no slight effect on the other party to the conversation.

Mrs. Lushington smiled behind her paper. What she heard only confirmed what she suspected. Her eyes shone, her brow cleared. She felt like a child that has put its puzzle together at last.

Lady Mary warmed with her subject; presently she declared, distinctly enough, that something was "not like *you*, my dear. In any other girl I'd have called it bold, forward, unwomanly!"

"Oh, mamma! mamma! don't say that!" pleaded a voice that could only belong to poor Norah. "If *you* think so, what must *he* have thought? Oh dear! oh dear! what shall I do? What shall I do?"

"It's never too late to remember your duty, my child," answered Lady Mary, "and I'm sure your father thinks as I do;" but though the words sounded brave enough, there was a tremble in the mother's voice that vibrated from the mother's heart.

"And I'll never see him again now, I *know!*" murmured Norah so piteously, that Lady Mary could hardly keep back her tears.

"Well, it's not come to that yet," said she kindly. "Annyways, it's wise to make ready for the worst. Kiss me, dear, and mind what I've been telling ye. See now, stay here a bit, till you're more composed. I'll send in little Ella to keep ye company. The child won't take notice, and ye can both come back together into the drawing-room, and no more said."

But long ere Lady Mary could finish her caresses, and get her motherly person under weigh, Mrs. Lushington had slipped into the billiard-room, where she was found by the gentlemen practising winning hazards in solitude, and where, challenging Lord St. Abbs to a game, she was left discomfited by his very uncivil rejoinder—

"I don't play billiards," said his lordship, and turned on his heel without further comment or excuse.

It was a new sensation for Mrs. Lushington to find herself thus thrown on general society, without at least one particular admirer on whose devotion she could rely. She didn't like it. She longed to have a finger in that mischief which is proverbially ready for "idle hands to do." On three people she now resolved to keep close and vigilant watch. These were Norah, St. Josephs, and Satanella.

The conduct of this last seemed baffling in the extreme. She had scarce vouchsafed a word to the General during dinner, had scowled at him more than once with the blackest of her black looks, and comported herself altogether like the handsome vixen she could be when she chose. Now, under pretence of setting down her coffee-cup, she had brought him to her side, and was whispering confidences in his ear, with a tenderness of tone and bearing he accepted gratefully, and repaid a hundred-fold.

"How tolerant are these *old* men!" thought Mrs. Lushington, "and how kind! What lovers they make, if only one can bring oneself not to mind wrinkles, and rheumatism, and grey hair! How gentle and how chivalrous! What patience and consideration! They don't expect a woman to be an angel, because they *do* know a little about us; and perhaps because it *is* only a little, they believe there is more than one degree between absolute perfection and utter depravity. If jealous, they have the grace to hide it; if snubbed, they do not sulk; if encouraged, they do not presume. They know when and where to speak, and to hold their tongues; to act, and to refrain. Besides, if one wants to make them unhappy, they are so sensitive, yet so quiet. A word or a look stings them to the quick, but they take their punishment with dignity; and though the blow be sharp and unprovoked, they never strike again. Let me see. I don't think I've had an admirer above forty—not one who owned to it, at least. It's a new experience. I declare, I'll try! This romantic old General would suit the place exactly, and I couldn't do a kinder thing for both, than to detach him from Blanche. The man is regularly wasted and thrown away. My gracious! isn't it ridiculous? If he could see us as we really are! If he only knew how much more willing a woman is to be controlled than a violent horse; how much easier to capture than a Sepoy column, or a Russian gun. And there he sits, a man who has ridden fearlessly against both, shrinking, hesitating, before a girl who might be his daughter — afraid, absolutely afraid, the gallant, heroic coward, to look her in the face! Is she blind? Is she a fool, not knowing what she throws away? or is she *really* over head and ears in love with somebody else? She can't be breaking her heart for Daisy, surely, or why has she taken the General up again, and put herself so much *en evidence* with him to-night? I'm puzzled, I own, but I'm not going to be beat. I'll watch her narrowly. I've nothing else to do. And it's an awful temptation, even when people are great friends. Wouldn't it be fun to cut her out with both?"

Thus reasoned Mrs. Lushington, according to her lights, scrutinising the couple she had set herself to study, while languidly listening to Lady Mary's conversation, which consisted, indeed, of speculations on the weather in the Channel, mingled with hospitable regrets for the departure of her guests, and the breaking-up of the party, which was to take place on the morrow.

"But ye'll come again next year," said this kind and courteous lady, who, anywhere but in her own house, would have disliked Mrs. Lushington from her heart. "And ye'll bring Miss Douglas with ye. If Miss Douglas she continues to be" (with a significant glance at the General, holding, clumsily enough, a skein of much tangled silk). "But, annyhow, I'll be lookin' for ye both Punchestown week, if not before, to give us a good long visit, and we'll teach ye to like Ireland, that we will, if kind wishes and a warm welcome can do't."

But even while she spoke, Lady Mary looked anxiously towards the door. Little Ella, a flaxen-haired romp of eleven, had jumped off long ago with a message for sister Norah, but neither having yet returned, the mother's heart ached to think of her handsome darling, smarting, perhaps, even under the mild reproof she had thought it wise to administer, perhaps weeping bitterly, to her little sister's consternation, because of the pain that burns so fiercely in a young unwearied heart—the longing for a happiness that can never be.

Presently, Lady Mary's brow cleared, and she gave a little sigh of relief, for Miss Ella's voice was heard, as usual, chattering loudly in the passage; and that young person, much elated at being still out of bed, came dancing into the room, followed by Norah, from whose countenance all traces of recent emotion had disappeared, and who looked, in her mother's eyes, only the prettier, that she was a shade paler than usual. While the younger child laughed and romped with the company, fighting shy of Lord St. Abbs, but hovering with great glee about papa, and entreating not to be sent upstairs for five more minutes, her sister stole quietly off to a lonely corner, where she subsided into an unoccupied sofa, with the air of being thoroughly fatigued.

Mrs. Lushington, covertly watching Satanella, wondered more and more.

Breaking away from her General, her silks, and her unfinished cup of tea, Miss Douglas walked across the room like a queen, took Norah's head in both hands, kissed her exactly between her eye-brows, and sat down composedly by her side.

CHAPTER XVI.

A GARDEN OF EDEN.

IN a comic opera, once much appreciated by soldiers of the French nation, there occurs a quaint refrain, to the effect that the gathering of strawberries in a certain wood at Malieux is a delightful pastime,

> "Quand on est deux,
> Quand on est deux—"

and the sentiment, thus expressed, seems applicable to all solitudes, suburban or otherwise, where winding paths and rustic seats admit of two abreast. But however favoured by nature, the very smoothest of lawns, and leafiest of glades, surely lose more than half their beauty, if we must traverse them unaccompanied by somebody who makes all the sunshine, and perhaps all the shade, of our daily life.

To wait for such a companion is nevertheless an irritating ordeal, even amidst the fairest scenery, trying both to temper and nerves. It has been said that none realise the pace at which Time gallops, till they have a bill coming due. On the other hand, none know how slow he can crawl, who have not kept an uncertain tryst with over-punctuality "under the greenwood tree!"

General St. Josephs was not a man to be late for any preconcerted meeting, either with friend or foe. It is a long way from Mayfair to Kensington Gardens; it seemed none the shorter for an impatient spirit and a heart beating with anxiety and hope. Yet the old soldier arrived at the appointed spot twenty minutes too soon, there to suffer torments from a truly British malady called "the fidgets," while diligently consulting his watch and reconnoitring his ground.

How many turns he made, pacing to and fro, between the round pond and the grove, through which he longed to behold his goddess advancing in a halo of light and beauty, he would have been ashamed to calculate.

Some women never *can* be in time for anything, even for a lover; and after half an hour's waiting, that seemed a week, he drew a little note from his breast-pocket, kissed it reverently, and read it once more from end to end.

It said twelve o'clock, no doubt, and certainly was a very short epistle to be esteemed so sweet. This is what, through many perusals, he had literally learned by heart:—

"MY DEAR GENERAL,

"I want a long talk. Shall I find you in Kensington Gardens, where you say it's so pretty, at twelve o'clock?

"Ever yours,

"BLANCHE."

Now, in this composition, there appeared one or two peculiarities that especially delighted its recipient.

She had hitherto signed herself "B. Douglas," never so much as writing her Christian name at length; and here she jumped boldly to "Blanche," the prettiest word, to his mind, in the English language, when standing thus, like Falstaff's sack, "simple of itself." Also, he had not forgotten the practice adopted by ladies in general of crossing a page on which there is plenty of space, to enhance its value, as you cross a cheque on your banker, that it may be honoured in the right quarter. One line had Satanella scrawled transversely over her note to this effect, "Don't be late; there is nothing I hate so much as waiting."

Altogether the General would not have parted with it for untold gold.

But *why* didn't she come? Looking round in every direction but the right, she burst upon him, like a vision, before he was aware. If he started, and turned a little pale, she marked it, we may be sure, and not with displeasure.

It was but the middle of May, yet the sky smiled bright and clear, the grass was growing, butterflies were already on the wing, birds were singing, and the trees had dressed themselves in their fairest garments of tender, early green. She too was in some light muslin robe, appropriate to the weather, with a transparent bonnet on her head, and a pink-tinted parasol in her hand. He thought, and she *knew*, she had never looked more beautiful in her life.

She began with a very unnecessary question. "Did you get my note?" said she. "Of course you did, or you wouldn't be here. I don't suppose you come into Kensington Gardens so early to meet anybody else!"

"Never did such a thing in my life!" exclaimed the General, quite frightened at the idea—but added, after a moment's thought—"It was very good of you to write, and better still to come."

"Now what on earth do you suppose I wanted to speak to you about?" she continued, in rather a hard voice. "Let us turn down here. I dare say you'd like all London to see us together; but that wouldn't suit me at all."

This was both unprovoked and unjust, for a more discreet person in such matters than the accused never existed. He felt hurt, and answered gravely, "I don't think I deserve *that*. You cannot say I have ever shown myself obtrusive or impatient with regard to *you*."

"Don't look vexed," she replied; "and don't scold me, though I deserve it. I am in one of my worst tempers this morning; and who can I wreak it on but *you?*—the kindest, the bravest, the most generous of men!"

His features quivered; the tears were not far from his eyes. A little boy with a hoop stood still, and stared up in his face, marvelling to see so tall a gentleman so greatly moved.

He took her hand. "You can always depend on *me*," he said softly; and, dropping it, walked on by her side in silence.

"I know I can," she answered. "I've known it a long time, though you don't think so. —What a hideous little boy! Now he's gone on with his hoop, I'll tell you what I mean.—One of the things that first made me like you, was this—you're a gentleman down to the heels of your boots!"

"There's not much in that," he replied, looking pleased, nevertheless. "So are most of the men amongst whom you live. A fellow ought to have something more than a good coat and decent manners, to be worthy of your regard;—and you *do* like me, Miss Douglas? Tell me so again. It is almost too much happiness for me to believe."

"That's not the question. If I hated anybody very much, do you think I would ask him to come and walk with me in Kensington Gardens at an hour when all respectable people are broiling in the Park?" said she, with one of her winning laughs. "You're wrong, though, about the people in good coats. What I call a gentleman is—well—I can't think of many—King Arthur, for instance, in 'Guinevere.'"

"Not Launcelot!" he asked. "I thought you ladies liked Launcelot best."

"There are plenty of Launcelots," she answered dreamily, "and always will be. *Not Launcelot, nor another*, except it be *my* General!"

Could he do less than take her arm and press it fondly to his side?

They had loitered into the seclusion of a forest-glade, that might have been a hundred miles from London. The little boy had vanished with his hoop, the nursery-maids and their charges were pervading the broad gravel walks and more frequented lawns of this sylvan paradise; not a soul was to be seen threading the stems of the tall trees but themselves, and an enthusiastic thrush straining its throat in their ears, seemed to ensure them from all observation less tolerant than its own.

"Now or never!" thought Satanella. "It *must* be done; and it's no use thinking about it!"

Turning round on her companion, she crossed her slender hands over his arm, looked caressingly in his face, and murmured—

"General, will you do me a favour?"

Pages could not have conveyed the gratification expressed by his monosyllable, "Try!"

She looked about, as if searching for some means of escape, then said hurriedly—

"I am in a difficulty. I want money. Will you help me?"

Watching his face, she saw it turn very grave. The most devoted of lovers, even while rejoicing because of the confidence reposed in him, cannot but feel that such a question must be approached with caution—that to answer it satisfactorily will require prudence, forethought, and self-sacrifice. To do the General justice, which Satanella at the moment did not, his circumspection was far removed from hesitation; he had no more idea of refusing, than the gallant horse who shortens his stride, and draws himself together, for a larger fence than common, that he may collect his energies, and cover it without a mistake.

For one delightful moment Miss Douglas felt a weight lifted from her heart, and was already beginning to unsay her words as gracefully as she might, when he stopped her, with a firm, deliberate acquiescence.

"Of course I will! And you ought to know by this time nothing can make me so happy as to be of use to you in any way. Forgive me, Miss Douglas—business is business—how much?"

Her face fell; she let go of his arm, and her lips were very dry, while she whispered, "Three thousand!"

He was staggered, and showed it, though he tried hard not to look surprised. Few men can lay their hands on three thousand pounds of hard money, at a moment's notice, without some personal inconvenience. Now the General was no capitalist, though in easy circumstances, and drawing the half-pay of his rank; to him such an outlay meant a decreased income for the rest of his life.

She was quite right about his being a gentleman. In a few seconds he had recovered his composure; in half a minute he said quietly—

"You shall have it at once. I am only so glad to be able to oblige you, that I wish it was more difficult. And now, Miss Douglas, you always say I'm a sad fidget, I'll go about it directly; I'll only ask you to come with me to the end of the walk."

She was crying beneath her veil; he saw the tears dropping on her hands, and would have liked to kiss them away on any other occasion but this.

"To the end of the world!" she answered, with the sobs and smiles of a child. "There's nobody like you—nobody!—not even King Arthur! Ask what you will, I'll never refuse you—never—as long as I live!"

But it need hardly be said that the General would rather have cut off his right hand, than have presumed on the position in which her confidence had placed him. Though she appreciated his consideration, she hardly understood why his manner became so unusually respectful and courteous, why his farewell—under the supervision of a cabman and a gate-keeper—should be almost distant; why he lifted his hat to her, at parting, as he would to the Queen—but, while he replaced it on his bald and grizzled head, Blanche Douglas was nearer being in love than she suspected with this true, unselfish admirer, who was old enough to be her father.

In women, far more than in men, there can exist an affection that springs from the head alone. It is the result of respect, admiration, and gratitude. It is to be won by devotion, consistency, above all, self-control; and, like a garden flower, so long as it is tended with attention, prospers bravely till autumn cools the temperature, and saddens all the sky. But this is a very different plant from the weed, wild rose, nightshade—call it what you will—that is sown by the winds of heaven, to strike root blindly and at haphazard in the heart; sweeter for being trampled, stronger for being broken, proof against the suns that scorch, the winds that shatter, the worm that eats away its core, and, refusing to die, even in the frown of winter, under the icy breath of scorn and unmerited neglect.

Which of these kindred sentiments the General had succeeded in awakening, was a problem he shrank from setting himself honestly to solve. He tried to hope it might be the one; he felt sadly convinced it was only the other. Traversing the gardens with swift, unequal strides, so as to leave them at the very farthest point from where his companion made her exit, for he was always loyal to *les convenances*, he argued the question with his own heart, till he dared not think about it any longer, subsiding at last into composure, with the chivalrous reflection, that, come what might, if he could but minister to the happiness of Blanche Douglas, he would grudge no sacrifice, even the loss of his money—shrink from no disappointment, even the destruction of his hopes.

Satanella meanwhile had selected a Hansom cab, in which to make her homeward journey, characteristically choosing the best-looking horse on the stand. To be seen, however, spanking along, at the rate of twelve miles an hour, in such a vehicle, she reflected, might be considered *fast* in a young unmarried lady, and originate, also, surmises as to the nature of her expedition; for it is quite a mistake to suppose that people in London are either blind or dumb, because they have so much on hand of their own, that they cannot devote all their attention to the business of their neighbours. With commendable modesty, therefore, she kept her parasol well before her face, so as to remain unrecognised by her friends, while she scanned everything about her with the keen, bright glances of a hawk. Bowling past Kingston House, then, and wondering whether it would not be possible, in time, to raise a domestic pedestal for General St. Josephs, on which she might worship him as a hero, if she could not love him as a Cupid, her Hansom cab passed within six inches of another, moving rapidly in the opposite direction; and who should be seated therein, smoking a cigar, with a white hat and light-coloured gloves, but ruined, reckless, never-to-be-forgotten Daisy!

She turned sick, and white even to the lips. In one glance, as women will, she had taken in every detail of his face and person, had marked that the one seemed devoid of care, the other well-dressed, as usual. Like a stab came the conviction, that ruin to *him* meant only a certain amount of personal inconvenience, irrespective of any extraneous sorrow or vexation; and in this she misjudged him, not quite understanding a nature she had unwittingly chosen for the god of her idolatry.

Though they passed each other so quickly, she stretched her arms out and spoke his name, but Daisy's whole attention was engrossed by a pretty horse-breaker in difficulties on his other side. Satanella felt, as she rolled on, that he had not recognised her, and that if she acted up to her own standard of right, this miserable glimpse must be their last meeting, for she ought never to see him again.

"He'll be sure to call, poor fellow!" she murmured, when she reached her own door. So it is fair to suppose she had been thinking of him for a mile and a quarter. "I should like to wish him good-bye, *really* for the last time. But no, no! Honour, even among thieves. And I'm sure *he* deserves it, that kind, noble, generous old man. Oh! I wish I was dead! I wish I was dead!" Then she paid the cabman (more than his fare), told her servant, in a strange, hoarse voice, that "she was at home to nobody this afternoon—nobody, not even Mrs. Lushington!" and so ran fiercely up-stairs, and locked herself in her room.

CHAPTER XVII.

"SOLDIER BILL."

DAISY placidly smoking, pursued the even tenor of his way, thinking of the pretty horse-breaker more than anything else; while disapproving, in a calm, meditative mood, of her hat, her habit, her bridle, and the leather tassels that dangled at her horse's nose.

The particular business Mr. Walters had at present on hand in London, or rather Kensington, must be explained.

Perhaps it may be remembered how, in a financial statement made by this young officer during the progress of a farce, he affirmed that, should he himself "burst-up," as he called it, a certain "Soldier Bill" would become captain of that troop which it was his own ambition to command. With the view of consulting this rising warrior in his present monetary crisis, Daisy had travelled, night and day, from Ireland, nor could he have chosen a better adviser in the whole Army List, as regarded kindness of heart, combined with that tenacious courage Englishmen call "pluck."

"I'm not a clever chap, I know," Bill used to acknowledge, in moments of expansion after dinner. "But what I say is this: If you've got to do a thing, catch hold, and do it! Keep square, run straight, and ride the shortest way! You won't beat *that*, my boy, with all the dodges that ever put one of your nobblers in the hole!"

It is but justice to admit that, in every relation of life, sport or earnest, this simple moralist acted strictly in accordance with his creed. That he was a favourite in his regiment need hardly be said. The younger son of a great nobleman, he had joined at seventeen, with a frank childish face and the spirits of a boy fresh from school. Before he was a week at drill, the very privates swore such a young dare-devil had never ridden in their ranks since the corps was raised. Utterly reckless, as it seemed, of life and limb, that fair-haired, half-grown lad, would tackle the wildest horse, swim the swiftest stream, leap the largest fence, and fight the strongest man, with such rollicking, mirthful enjoyment, as could only spring from an excess of youthful energy and light-heartedness. But, somehow, he was never beat, or *didn't know* it when he *was*. Eventually, it always turned out that the horse was mastered, the stream crossed, the fence cleared, and the man obliged to give in. His warlike house had borne for centuries on their shield the well-known motto, "Go on!" To never a scion of the line could it have been more appropriate than to this light-footed, light-headed, light-hearted Light Dragoon!

In his own family, of course, he was the pet and treasure of all. His mother worshipped him, though he kept her in continual hot water with his vagaries. His sisters thought (perhaps reasonably enough) that there was nobody like him in the world. And his stately old father, while he frowned and shook his head at an endless catalogue of larks, steeple-chases, broken bones, &c., was more proud of Bill in his heart than of all his ancestors and all his other sons put together.

They were a distinguished race. Each had made his mark in his own line. It was "Soldier Bill's" ambition to attain military fame; every step in the ladder seemed to him, therefore, of priceless value, and promotion was as the very breath of his nostrils.

But a man who delights in personal risk is rarely of a selfish nature. In reply to Daisy's statement, made with that terseness of expression, that total absence of circumlocution, complimentary or otherwise, which distinguishes the conversation of a mess-table, Bill ordered his visitor a "brandy-and-soda" on the spot, and thus delivered himself.

"Troop be d—d, Daisy! It's no fun soldiering without your 'pals.' I'd rather be a Serrafile for the rest of my life, or a bâtman, or a trumpeter, by Jove! than command the regiment only because all the good fellows in it had come to grief. Sit down. Never mind the bitch, she's always smelling about a strange pair of legs, but she won't lay hold, if you keep perfectly still. Have a weed, and let's see what can be done!"

The room in which their meeting took place was characteristic of its occupant. Devoid of superfluous furniture, and with an uncarpeted floor, it boasted many works of art, spirited enough, and even elaborate, in their own particular line. The series of prints representing a steeple-chase, in which yellow jacket cut out all the work, and eventually won by a neck, could not be surpassed for originality of treatment and fidelity of execution. Statuettes of celebrated acrobats stood on brackets along the walls, alternating with cavalry spurs, riding-whips, boxing-gloves, and basket-hilted sticks, while the place of honour over the chimney-piece was filled by a portrait of Mendoza in fighting attitude, at that halcyon period of the prize-ring,

> "When Humphreys stood up to the Israelite's thumps,
> In kerseymere breeches, and 'touch-me-not' pumps."

"It's very pleasant this," observed Daisy, with his legs on a chair, to avoid the attentions of Venus, an ill-favoured lady of the "bull" kind, beautiful to connoisseurs as her Olympian namesake, but for the uninitiated an impersonation of hideous ferocity and anatomical distortion combined.

"Jolly little crib, isn't it?" replied Bill; "and though I'm not much in 'fashionable circles,' suits me down to the ground. Wasn't it luck, though, the smallpox and the regimental steeple-chase putting so many of our captains on the sick-list, that they detached a subaltern here to command? We were so short of officers, my boy, I thought the Chief would have made you 'hark back' from Ireland. Don't you wish he had? You'd better have been in bed on the 17th; though, by all accounts, you rode the four miles truly through, and squeezed the old mare as dry as an orange!"

"Gammon!" retorted Daisy. "She had five pounds in hand, only we got jostled at the run-in. I'll make a match to-morrow with Shaneen for any sum they like, same course, same weights, and—— But I'm talking nonsense! I couldn't pay if I lost. I can't pay up what I owe now. I'm done, old boy; that's all about it. When a fellow can't swim any farther, there's nothing for it but to go under!"

His friend pulled a long face, whistled softly, took Venus on his lap, and pondered with all his might.

"Look here, Daisy," was the result of his cogitations; "when you've got to fight a cove two stone above your weight, you don't blunder in at him, hammer-and-tongs, to get your jolly head knocked off in a couple of rounds. No; if you have the condition (and that's everything), you keep dodging, and waiting, and out-fighting, till your man's blown. Then you tackle to, and finish him up before he gets his wind again. Now this is just your case. Ask for leave; the Chief will stand it well enough, if he knows you're in a fix. *I'll* do your duty, and you must get away somewhere, and keep dark, till we've all had time to turn ourselves round."

"Where can I go to?" said Daisy. "What a queer smell there is in this room, Bill! Something between dead rats and a Stilton cheese."

"Smell!" answered his host. "Pooh; nonsense. That's the badger; he lives in the bottom drawer of my wardrobe. We call him 'Benjamin.' Don't you *like* the smell of a badger, Daisy?"

Now, "Benjamin" was a special favourite with his owner, in consideration of the creature's obstinate and tenacious courage. Bill loved it from his heart, protesting it was the only living thing from which he "took a licking;" because on one occasion, after a *very* noisy supper, the man had tried, and failed, to "draw" the beast from its lair with his teeth! Therefore, "Benjamin" was now a free brother of the Guild, well cared for, unmolested, living on terms of armed neutrality with the redoubtable Venus herself.

Ignoring as deplorable prejudice Daisy's protest that he did *not* like the smell of a badger, his friend returned with unabated interest to the previous question.

"You mustn't stay in London, that's clear; though I've heard there's no covert like it to hang in for a fellow who's robbed a church! But it wouldn't suit *you*. You're not bad enough; besides, it's too near Hounslow. The

Continent's no use. Travelling costs a hat-full of money, and it's very slow abroad now the fighting's over. A quiet place, not too far from home; that's the ticket!"

"There's Jersey," observed Daisy doubtfully. "I don't know where it is, but I daresay it's quiet enough."

"Jersey be hanged!" exclaimed his energetic friend. "Why not Guernsey, Alderney, or what do you say to Sark? No, we must hit on a happier thought than that. You crossed last night, you say. Does any one know you're in town?"

"Only the waiter at Limmer's. I had breakfast there, and left my portmanteau, you know."

"Limmer's! I wish you hadn't gone to Limmer's! Never mind; the waiter is easily squared. Now, look here, Daisy, you're not supposed to be in London. Is there no retired spot you could dodge back to in Ireland, where you can get your health, and live cheap? Who's to know you ever left it?"

His friend Denis occurred to Daisy at once.

"There's a farm up in Roscommon," said he, "where they'd take me in and welcome. The air's good, and living *must* be cheap, for you can't get anything to eat but potatoes! I shouldn't wonder if they hunted all the year round in those hills, and the farmer is a capital fellow, never without a two-year-old that can jump!"

"That sounds like it," responded the other, with certain inward longings of his own for this favoured spot. "Now, Daisy, will you ride to orders, and promise to be guided entirely by *me?*"

"All right," said Daisy; "fire away."

"Barney!" shouted his friend, in a voice that resounded over the barracks, startling even the sergeant of the guard. "Barney! look sharp. Tell them to put a saddle on Catamount, and turn him round ready to go out; then come here."

In two minutes a shock-headed bâtman, obviously Irish, entered the apartment, and stood at "attention," motionless, but for the twinkling of his light blue eyes.

"Go to Limmer's at once," said his master; "pay Mr. Walters's bill. Breakfast and B. and S., of course? Pack his things, and take them to Euston Station. Wait there till he comes, and see him off by the Irish mail. Do you understand?"

"I do, sur," answered Barney, and vanished like a ghost.

"You've great administrative powers, Bill," said his admiring friend. "Hang it! you're fit to command an army."

"I could manage the commissariat, I think," answered the other modestly; "but of course you're only chaffing. I'm not a wise chap, I know; never learnt anything at school, and had the devil's own job to pass for my cornetcy. But I'll tell you what I *can* do. When a course is marked out, and the stewards have told me which side of the flags I'm to go, I *do* know my right hand from my left, and that's more than every fellow can say who gets up for a flutter in the pig-skin! And now I'm off to head-quarters to see the Chief, and ask leave for you till muster, at any rate."

"You won't find him," observed Daisy. "It must be two o'clock now."

"Not find him!" repeated the other. "Don't you know the Chief better than that? He gets home-sick if he is a mile from the barrack-yard. It's my belief he was born in spurs, with the 'state' of the regiment in his hand! Besides, he's ordered a parade for fitting on the new nose-bags at three. He wouldn't miss it to go to the Derby."

"You *are* a good chap," said his friend. "It's a long ride, and a beastly hard road!"

Bill was by this time dressing with inconceivable rapidity, and an utter disregard of his comrade's presenee.

"A long ride," he repeated, in high scorn, while he dashed into a remarkably well-made coat. "What do you call a long ride with a quad. like Catamount? Five-and-forty minutes is what he allows me from gate to gate; and it takes Captain Armstrong all his time, I can tell you, to keep him back to *that!* The beggar ran away with me one night from Ashbourne to the Royal Barracks in Dublin; and though it was so dark you couldn't see your hand, he never made a wrong turn, nor let me get a pull at him, till he laid his nose against his own stable-door. Bless his chesnut heart! he's the worst mouth and the worst temper of any horse in Europe. Look at him now. There's a pair of iron legs, and a wicked eye! It's rather good fun to see him kick directly I'm up. But I've never had such a hack, and I wouldn't part with him to be made Commander-in-Chief."

Daisy could do no less than accompany his host to the door, and see him mount this redoubtable animal, the gift of a trainer at the Curragh, who could do nothing with it, and opined that even Soldier Bill's extraordinary nerve would be unequal to compete with so restive a brute. He had miscalculated, however, the influence utter fearlessness can establish over the beasts of the field.

Catamount's first act of insubordination, indeed, was to run away with his new master for four miles on end, across the Curragh, but over excellent turf, smooth as a bowling-green: he discovered, to his surprise, that Bill wished no better fun. He then repeated the experiment in a stiffly-fenced part of Kildare; and here found himself not only indulged, but instigated to continue, when he wanted to leave off. He tried grinding his rider's leg against the wall: Bill turned a sharp spur inwards, and made it very uncomfortable. He lay down: Bill kept him on the ground an hour or two by sitting on his head. At last he confined himself to kicking unreasonably, at intervals, galloping sullenly on, nevertheless, in the required direction, and doing a vast amount of work in an incredibly short space of time. He was never off his feed, and his legs never filled, so to Bill he was invaluable, notwithstanding their disputes, and a certain soreness about a cup the horse ought to have won, had he not sulked at the finish: they loved each other dearly, and would have been exceedingly loth to part.

"My sergeant's wife will get you some dinner," said the rider, between certain preliminary kicks in getting under way. "She's an outside cook, and I've told her what you'd like. There's a bottle of brandy on the chimney-piece, and soda-water in the drawer next the badger. I'll be back before it's time for you to start. Cut along, Catamount! Hang it! don't get me off the shop-board before half the troop. Forrard, my lad! forrard away!" and Bill galloped out of the barracks at headlong speed, much to the gratification of the sentry manipulating his carbine at the gate.

This true friend proved as good as his word. In less than three hours he was back again, Catamount having hardly turned a hair in their excursion. The Colonel had been kindness itself. The leave was all right. There was nothing more to be done, but to pack Daisy off in a Hansom for Euston Square.

"Take a pony, old man," said Bill, urging his friend to share his purse, while he wished him "good-bye." "If I'd more you should have it. Nonsense! I don't want it a bit. Keep your pecker up and fight high! Write a line if anything turns up. I'll go on working the job here, never fear. We won't let you out of the regiment. What is life, after all, to a fellow who isn't a Light Dragoon?"

CHAPTER XVIII.

DELILAH.

IN consoling his friend, *Xanthias Phoceus,* for the result of a little flirtation, in which that Roman gentleman seems to have indulged without regard to station, Horace quotes for us a triad of illustrious persons whose brazen-plated armour and bull's-hide targets were of no avail to fence them from the shafts of love. If neither petulant Achilles, nor Ajax, son of Telamon, nor the king of men himself, could escape, it is not to be supposed that a young cavalry officer in her Majesty's service, however simple in his habits and frank in his demeanour, should be without some weakness of the same nature, unacknowledged perhaps, yet none the less a weakness on that account.

"Soldier Bill," notwithstanding his kindly disposition and fresh comely face, seemed the last man in the world to be susceptible of female influence, yet "Soldier Bill" felt, to a certain extent, in the same plight as Agamemnon. Though in dress, manners, and appearance, anything but what is usually termed "a ladies' man," he was nevertheless a prime favourite with the sex, on such rare occasions as threw him in their way. Women in general seem most to appreciate qualities not possessed by themselves, and while they greatly admire all kinds of courage, find that which is mingled with good-humoured hap-hazard recklessness, perfectly irresistible. They worship their heroes too, and believe in them, with ludicrous good faith. Observe a woman in a pleasure-boat. If there comes a puff of wind, she never takes her eyes off the boatman, and trusts him implicitly. The more frightened she feels, the more confidence she places in her guardian, and so long as the fancied danger lasts, clings devotedly to the pilot, be he the roughest, hairiest, tarriest son of Neptune that ever turned a quid.

Now the converse of this relation between the sexes holds equally good. To live entirely with men and horses; to *rough it* habitually from day to day, enduring hardships voluntary or otherwise, in the pursuit of field-sports; to share his studies with a dog, and take his pastime with a prize-fighter, does not necessarily unfit a man for the society of gentler, softer, sweeter, craftier creatures. On the contrary, in many natures, and those perhaps the strongest, such habits produce a longing for female society, deeper and keener that it has to be continually repudiated and repressed.

When he had started Daisy for the station, Bill renewed his toilet with peculiar care, and in spite of a few scars on his face, some the effects of falls, others, alas! of fights, a very good-looking young gentleman he saw reflected in his glass. Smoothing a pair of early moustaches, and sleeking a close-cropped head, he searched about in vain for a scent-bottle, and actually drew on a pair of kid gloves. Obviously, "Soldier Bill" was going to call on a lady. He could not help laughing, while he thought how the cornets would chaff him, if they knew. Nevertheless, with a farewell caress to the badger, fresh, radiant, and undaunted, he sallied forth.

It was quite in accordance with the doctrine of opposites, propounded above, that Bill should have experienced a sensation of refreshment and repose in the society of a charming married woman, very much his senior, who made light of him no doubt, but amused, indulged, and instructed him while she laughed. Her boudoir was indeed a pleasant change from his barrack-room. He could not but admit that in *her* society tea seemed a more grateful beverage than brandy and soda; the tones of a pianoforte sweeter than any stable-call; and the perfume that pervaded every article about her far more delightful, if less pungent, than that which hung round his retiring friend "Benjamin," in the bottom drawer of the wardrobe.

In his wildest moments, however, Bill never dreamed of making love to her; and it is not difficult to understand that his goddess, being no less experienced a person than Mrs. Lushington, was well able to take care of herself.

"I like the boy," she used to say to any one who would listen, even to her husband, if nobody else could be found. "He is so fresh and honest, and he looks so *clean!* It's like having a nice child about one, and then I can do him so much good. I form his manners, teach him the ways of society, prevent his being imposed upon, and generally make him fit for civilised life. If there were no good-natured people like me, Frank, these poor young things would fall a prey to the first designing girl who comes across them on the war-path, looking out to catch a husband *coûte que coûte.* I'm sure his mother ought to be infinitely obliged to me. She couldn't take more pains with him herself! When he began coming here, he didn't know how to waltz, or to take off his hat, or to answer a note even; in short, he couldn't say Bo to a goose! And now I've made him learn all these things, and he does them well, particularly the last. He's still absurdly shy, I grant you, but it's wearing off day by day. When I'm grown old, Frank, and wrinkled (though I'd sooner die first), he'll be grateful, and understand what care I've taken of him, and what a sad fate might have befallen him, but for *me!* Isn't there something in Dr. Watts, or somebody,

> 'Regardless of their doom,
> The little victims play'?

Frank! I don't believe you're listening!"

"Oh yes, I am," answers Frank, whose thoughts have wandered to Skindle's, Richmond, Newmarket—who knows where? "What you say is very true, my dear—very true—and nobody understands these things better than yourself. Good gracious! is that clock right? I had no idea it was so late! I must be off at once, and—let me see—I'll get back to dinner if I *can*; but don't wait."

So *exit* Mr. Lushington on his own devices, and enter a footman with tea, closely followed by the butler ushering in "Soldier Bill."

"Talk of somebody," says the lady, graciously extending her hand, "and, we are told, he is sure to appear. How odd, I was abusing you not five minutes ago to Frank—you must have met him as you came in,—and, behold, here you are—not having been near me for a month!"

"A week," answered her visitor, who always stuck to facts. "You told me yourself one ought never to call again at the same house till after a decent interval. A week is decent surely! It seems a deuced long time, I know."

"You don't suppose I've missed you," said she, pouring out the tea. "It's all for your own good I have you here. You'd get back to savage life again if I neglected you for a fortnight; and it *is* provoking to see all one's time and trouble thrown away! Now put your hat down, have some tea, make yourself agreeable, and you may stay for exactly three-quarters of an hour!"

To "make himself agreeable" at short notice, and to order, is a difficult task for any man. For Bill it was simply impossible. He fidgeted, gulped hot tea, and began to feel shy. She had considerable tact, however, and no little experience in the ways of young men. She neither laughed at him nor took notice of the blush he tried to keep down, but bade him throw the window open, and while he obeyed, continued carelessly, though kindly—

"In the first place, tell me all about yourself. How's Catamount?"

She knew every one of his horses by name, and even some of the men in his troop, leading him to talk on such congenial topics with considerable ingenuity. It was this tact of hers that rendered Mrs. Lushington such a pleasant member of society, enabling her to keep her head above water deep enough to have drowned a lady with less *savoir-faire*, and consequently fewer friends.

His face brightened. "As fresh as paint!" he replied. "I beg your pardon; I mean as well as can be expected. I rode him two-and-twenty miles to-day in an hour and a half, and I give you my word when I got off him he looked as if he'd never been out of the stable."

"I should pity *you* more than your horse," she replied, with a commendable air of interest, "only I know you are never so happy as when you are trying to break your neck. You've had the grace to dress since, I see, and not badly, for once, only that handkerchief is too light a shade of blue. Now, confess! Where does she live? and is she worth riding eleven miles, there and back, to see?"

"I never know whether you're chaffing or not!" responded Bill. "You cannot believe I would gallop Catamount twenty-two miles on a hard road for any lady in the world. I don't suppose he'd take me if I wanted to go. *She*, indeed! There's no *she* in the matter!"

"You might have made *one* exception in common politeness," said Mrs. Lushington, laughing. "But I'm not satisfied yet. You and Catamount are a very flighty pair. I still think there's a lady in the case."

"A lady in boots and spurs, then," he answered; "six foot high, with grey moustaches and a lame leg from a sabre-cut—a lady who has been thirty years soldiering, and never gave or questioned an unreasonable order. Do you know *many* ladies of that stamp, Mrs. Lushington? I only know one, and she has made *my* regiment the smartest in the service."

"I *do* know your Colonel a little," said she. "I met him once at Aldershot, and though he is anything but an old woman, I consider him an old *dear!* So I am not very far wrong, after all. Now, what did he want you for? Sent for you, of course, to have—what do you call it?—*a wigging*. I'm afraid, Master Bill, you're a sad, bad boy, and always getting into scrapes."

"Wigging!" he repeated indignantly. "Not a bit of it; nothing could have been kinder than the Chief. He's the best old fellow in the world! I wasn't sent for. I didn't go on my own account; I went down about Daisy."

Then he stopped short, afraid of having committed himself, and conscious that at the present crisis of his brother-officer's affairs, the less said about them the better.

But who, since the days of Samson, was ever able to keep a secret from a woman resolved to worm it out? As the strong man in Delilah's lap, so was Bill in the boudoir of Mrs. Lushington.

"Daisy," she repeated; "do you know anything of Daisy? Tell me all about him. We're so interested, you can't think, and so sorry for his difficulties. I wish I could help him. Is there nothing to be done?"

Touched by her concern for his friend's welfare, he trusted her at once.

"You won't mention it," said he; "Daisy was with me at Kensington to-day. He can't show yet, you know; but still we hope to make it all right in time. He's got a month's leave for the present; and I packed him off, to start by the Irish mail to-night, just before I came to see you. He'll keep quiet over there, and people won't know where he is; so they can't write, and then say he doesn't answer their letters. Anything to put off the smash as long as possible. One can never tell what may turn up."

"You're a kind friend," she replied approvingly, "and a good boy. There! that's a great deal for me to say. Now tell me *where* the poor fellow is gone."

"You won't breathe it to a soul," said honest Bill—"not even to Mr. Lushington?"

"Not even to Mr. Lushington!" she protested, greatly amused.

He gave her the address with profound gravity, and an implicit reliance on her secrecy.

"A hill-farmer in Roscommon!" she exclaimed. "I know the man. His name is Denis; I saw him at Punchestown."

"You know everything," he said, in a tone of admiration. "It must be very jolly to be clever, and that."

"It's much jollier to be 'rich and that,'" was her answer. "Money is what we all seem to want—especially poor Daisy. Now, how much do you suppose it would take to set him straight?"

He was not the man to trust any one by halves. "Three thousand," he declared frankly; "and where he is to get it beats me altogether Of course he can't hide for ever. After a time he must come back to do duty; then there'll be a show up, and he'll have to leave the regiment."

"And you will get your troop," said Mrs. Lushington. "You see I know all about that too."

His own promotion, however, as has been said, afforded this kind-hearted young gentleman no sort of consolation.

"I hope it won't come to that," was his comment on the military knowledge of his hostess. "I've great faith in luck. When things are at their worst, they mend. Never say die till your dead, Mrs. Lushington. Take your 'crowners' good-humouredly. Stick to your horse; and don't let go of the bridle!"

"You've been here more than your three-quarters of an hour," said Mrs. Lushington, "and you're beginning to talk slang, so you'd better depart. But you're improving, I *think*, and you may come again. Let me see, the day after to-morrow, if the Colonel don't object, and if you can find another handkerchief with a deeper shade of blue."

So Bill took his leave, and proceeded to "The Rag," where he meant to dine in company with other choice spirits, wondering whether it would ever be his lot to marry a woman like Mrs. Lushington—younger, of course, and perhaps, though he hardly ventured to tell himself so, with a little less chaff—doubting the while if he could consent so entirely to change his condition and his daily, or perhaps rather his *nightly*, habits of life. He need not give up the regiment, he reflected, and could keep Catamount, though the stud might have to be reduced. But what would become of Benjamin? Was it possible any lady would permit the badger to occupy a bottom drawer in her wardrobe? This seemed a difficult question. Pending its solution, perhaps he had better remain as he was!

CHAPTER XIX.

"THE RIVER'S BRIM."

DAISY was sick of the Channel. He had crossed and re-crossed it so often of late as to loathe its dancing waters, yawning in the face of Welsh and Wicklow mountains alike, wearied even of the lovely scenery that adorns the coast on either side.

He voted himself so tired in body and mind, that he must stay a day or two in Dublin to refresh.

A man who balances on the verge of ruin always has plenty of money in his pocket for immediate necessities. The expiring flame leaps up with a flash; the end of the bottle bubbles out with a gush; and the ebbing tide of wealth leaves, here and there, a handful of loose cash on the deserted shore.

Daisy drove to the most expensive hotel in Dublin, where he ordered a capital breakfast and a comfortable room. The future seemed very uncertain. In obedience to an instinct of humanity, that bids men pause and dally with any crisis of their fate, he determined to enjoy to-day and let to-morrow take care of itself.

Nobody could be more unlikely to analyse his own sensations. It was not the practice of the regiment; but had Daisy been given to self-examination, it would have puzzled him to explain why he felt in such good humour, and so well-satisfied—buoyed up with hope, when he ought to have been sunk and overwhelmed in despair.

"Waiter," said the fugitive, while he finished his tea and ordered a glass of curaçoa. "Has Mr. Sullivan been here this morning?"

"He *did*, sur," answered the waiter, with a pleasant grin. "Sure he brought a harse for the master to see. Five years old, Captain. A clane-bred one, like what ye ride yerself. There's not the aqual of him, they do be braggin', for leppin', in Westmeath, an' thim parts, up there, where he was trained."

Now Daisy wanted a horse no more than he wanted an alligator. He could neither afford to buy nor keep one, and had two or three of his own that it was indispensable to sell, yet his eye brightened, his spirits rose, with the bare possibility of a deal. He might see the animal, at any rate, he thought, perhaps ride it—there would be others probably to show; he could spend a few pleasant hours in examining their points, discussing their merits, and interchanging with Mr. Sullivan those brief and pithy remarks, intelligible only to the initiated, which he esteemed the essence of pleasant conversation. Like many other young men, Daisy was bitten with hippomania. He thoroughly enjoyed the humours of a dealer's yard. The horses interested, the owner amused him. He liked the selection, the bargaining, the running up and down, the speculation, and the slang. To use his own words—"He never could resist *the rattle of a hat!*"

It is no wonder then, that "the Captain," as Mr. Sullivan called him, spent his whole afternoon at a snug little place within an easy drive of Dublin, where that worthy, though not by way of being in the profession, inhabited a clean white-washed house, with a few acres of marvellously green paddock, and three or four loose boxes, containing horses of various qualities, good, bad, and indifferent. Here, after flying, for an hour or two, over the adjoining fields and fences, Daisy, with considerable difficulty, resisted the purchase (on credit) of a worn-out black, a roan with heavy shoulders, and a three-year-old, engaged in the following autumn at the Curragh; but afforded their owner perfect satisfaction by the encomiums he passed on their merits, no less than by the masterly manner in which he handled them, at the formidable fences that bordered Mr. Sullivan's domain.

"An' ye'll take nothing away with ye but a fishing-rod!" said the latter, pressing on his visitor the refreshment of whiskey, with or without water. "Ye're welcome to't, annyhow—more by token that ye'll bring it back again when ye've done with it, Captain, and proud I'll be to get another visit from ye, when ye're travelling the country, to or from Dublin, at anny time. May be in the back end of the year I'll have wan to show ye in thim boxes, that ye niver seen the likes of him for lep-racin'. Whisper now. He's bet the Black Baron in a trial; and for Shaneen, him that wan the race off *your* mare at Punchestown,—wait till I tell ye,—at even weights, he'd go and *lose* little Shaneen in two miles!"

Promising to return at a future time for inspection of this paragon, and disposing the borrowed fishing-rod carefully on an outside car he had chartered for his expedition, Daisy returned to Dublin, ate a good dinner, drank a bottle of dry champagne, and went to sleep in the comfortable bedroom of his comfortable hotel, as if he had not a care nor a debt in the world.

Towards morning, his lighter slumbers may have been visited by dreams, and if so, it is probable that fancy clothed her visions in a similitude of Norah Macormac. Certainly, his first thought on waking was for that young lady, as his opening eyes rested on the fishing-rod, which he had borrowed chiefly on her account.

In truth, Daisy felt inclined to put off as long as possible the exile—for he could think of it in no more favourable light—that he had brought on himself in the Roscommon mountains.

Mr. Sullivan, when the sport of fly-fishing came in his way, was no mean disciple of the gentle art. Observing a salmon-rod in that worthy's sitting-room, of which apartment, indeed, with two foxes'-brushes and a barometer, it constituted the principal furniture, Daisy bethought him, that on one of his visits to Cormac's-town, its hospitable owner had given him leave and license to fish the Dabble whenever he pleased, whether staying at the Castle or not. The skies were cloudy—as usual in Ireland, there was no lack of rain—surely, this would be a proper occasion to take advantage of Macormac's kindness, protract his stay in Dublin, and run down daily by the train to fish, so long as favourable weather lasted, and his own funds held out.

We are mostly self-deceivers, though there exists something *within* each of us that is not to be hoodwinked nor imposed upon by the most specious of fallacies.

It is probable Daisy never confessed to himself how the fish he *really* wanted to angle for was already more than half-hooked; how it was less the attraction of a salmon than a mermaid that drew him to the margin of the Dabble; and, how he cared very little that the sun shone bright or the river waned, so as he might but hear the light step of Norah Macormac on the shingle, look in the fair face that turned so pale and sad when he went away, that would smile and blush its welcome so kindly when he came again.

He must have loved her without knowing it; and perhaps such insensible attachments, waxing stronger day by day, strike the deepest root, and boast the longest existence—hardy plants that live and flourish through the frowns of many winters, contrasting nobly with more brilliant and ephemeral posies, forced by circumstances to sudden maturity and rapid decay—

> "As flowers that first in spring-time burst,
> The earliest wither too."

Nevertheless, for both sexes—

> "'Tis all but a dream at the best:"

and Norah Macormac's vision, scarcely acknowledged while everything went smoothly, assumed very glowing colours when the impossibility of its realisation dawned on her, and Lady Mary pointed out the folly of an attachment to a penniless subaltern, unsteady in habits, while addicted overmuch to sports of the field.

With average experience and plenty of common sense, the mother had been sorely puzzled how to act. She was well aware that advice in such cases, however judiciously administered, often irritates the wound it is intended to heal; that "warnings"—to use her own words—"only put things in people's heads;" and that a fancy, like a heresy, sometimes dies out unnoticed, when it is not to be stifled by argument nor extirpated with the strong hand. Yet how might she suffer this pernicious superstition to grow, under her very eyes? Was she not a woman, and must she not speak her mind? Besides, she blamed her own blindness, that her daughter's intimacy with the scapegrace had been unchecked in its commencement, and, smarting with self-reproach, could not forbear crying aloud, when she had better have held her tongue!

So Miss Norah discovered she was in love, after all. Mamma said so; no doubt mamma was right. The young lady had herself suspected something of the kind long ago, but Lady Mary's authority and remonstrances placed the matter beyond question. She was very fond of her mother, and, to do her justice, tried hard to follow her ladyship's advice. So she thought the subject over, day by day, argued it on every side, in accordance with, in opposition to, and independent of, her own inclinations, to find as a result, that during waking and sleeping hours alike, the image of Daisy was never absent from her mind.

Then a new beauty seemed to dawn in the sweet young face. The very peasants about the place noticed a change; little Ella, playing at being grown-up, pretended she was "Sister Norah going to be married;" and papa, when she retired with her candle at night, turning fondly to his wife, would declare—

"She'll be the pick of the family now, mamma, when all's said and done! They're a fair-looking lot, even the boys. Divil thank them, then, on the mother's side! But it's Norah that's likest yourself, my dear, when we were young, only not quite so stout, maybe, and a thought less colour in her cheek."

Disturbed at the suggestion, while gratified by the compliment, Lady Mary, in a fuss of increased anxiety, felt fonder than ever of her child. In Norah's habits also there came an alteration, as in her countenance. She sat much in the library, with a book on her knee, of which she seldom turned the page; played long *solos* on the pianoforte, usually while the others were out; went to bed early, but lay awake for hours; rode very little, and walked a great deal, though the walks were often solitary, and almost invariably in the direction of a certain waterfall, to which she had formerly conducted Miss Douglas, while showing off to her new friend the romantic beauties of the Dabble.

The first day Mr. Walters put his borrowed rod together on the banks of this pretty stream it rained persistently in a misty drizzle, borne on the soft south wind. He killed an eight-pound fish, yet returned to Dublin in an unaccountable state of disappointment, not to say disgust. He got better after dinner, and, with another bottle of dry champagne, determined to try again.

The following morning rose in unclouded splendour—clear blue sky, blazing sun, and not a breath of wind. A more propitious day could scarcely be imagined for a cricket-match, an archery-meeting, or a picnic; but in such weather the crafty angler leaves rod and basket at home. Daisy felt a little ashamed of these paraphernalia in the train, but proceeded to the water-side nevertheless, and prepared deliberately for his task, looking up and down the stream meanwhile with considerable anxiety.

All at once he felt his heart beating fast, and began to flog the water with ludicrous assiduity.

It is difficult to explain the gentleman's perturbation (for why was he there at all?), though the lady's astonishment can easily be accounted for, when Norah, thinking of him every moment, and visiting this particular spot only because it reminded her of his presence, found herself, at a turn in the river, not ten paces from the man whom, a moment before, she feared she was never to see again!

Yet did she remain outwardly the more composed of the two, and was first to speak.

"Daisy!" she exclaimed—"Captain Walters—I never thought you were still in Ireland. You'll be coming to the Castle to dinner, anyhow."

He blushed, he stammered, he looked like a fool (though Norah didn't think so), he got out with difficulty certain incoherent sentences about "fishing," and "flies," and "liberty from your father," and lastly, recovering a little, "the ten-pounder *I* rose and *you* landed, by the black stump there, under the willow."

As he regained his confidence, she lost hers—almost wishing she hadn't come, or had put her veil down, or she didn't exactly know what. In a trembling voice, and twining her fingers nervously together, she propounded the pertinent question—

"How—how did you find your brother-officers when you got back to the regiment?"

Its absurdity struck them both. Simultaneously they burst out laughing: their reserve vanished from that moment. He took both her hands in his, and the rod lay neglected on the shingle, while he exclaimed—

"I *am* so pleased to see you again! Miss Macormac—Norah! I fished here all yesterday, hoping you'd come. I'm glad, though, you didn't; you'd have got such a wetting."

"Did you now?" was her answer, while the beautiful grey eyes deepened, and the blood mantled in her cheek. "Indeed, then, it's for little I'd have counted the wetting, if I'd only known. But how *was* I to know, Captain Walters—well, Daisy, then—that you'd be shooting up the river, like a young salmon, only to see *me?* And supposing I *had* known it, or thought it, or wished it even, I'm afraid I ought never to have come."

"But now you *are* here," argued Daisy, with some show of reason, "you'll speak to me, won't you? and help me to fish, and let me walk back with you part of the way home?"

It seemed an impotent conclusion, but she was in no mood to be censorious.

"I'm very pleased to see you, and that's the truth," she answered; "but as for fishing, I'll engage ye'll never rise a fish in the Dabble with a sky like that. I'll stay just five minutes, though, while ye wet your line, anyhow. Oh! Daisy, don't you remember what a trouble we had with the big fish down yonder, the time I ran to fetch the gaff?"

"Remember!" said Daisy, "I should think I *do!* How quick you were about it! I didn't think any girl in the world could run so fast. I can remember everything you've said and done since I've known you. That's the worst of it, Norah. It's got to be different after to-day."

She had been laughing and blushing at his recollections of her activity; but she glanced quickly in his face now, while her own turned very grave and pale.

"Ye're coming to the Castle, of course," said she. "I'll run home this minute, and tell mamma to order a room, and we'll send the car round to the station for your things."

She spoke in hurried, nervous accents, dreading to hear what was coming, yet conscious she had never felt so happy in her life.

Formerly she considered Daisy the lightest-hearted of men. Hitherto she scarcely remembered to have seen a cloud on his face. She liked it none the worse for its gravity now.

"I've been very unlucky, Norah," said he, holding her hand, and looking thoughtfully on the river as it flowed by. "Perhaps it's my own fault. I shall never visit at Cormac's-town, nor go into any society where I've a chance of meeting *you* again. And yet I've done nothing wrong nor disgraceful as yet."

"I knew it!" she exclaimed; "I'd have sworn it on the Book! I told mamma so. 'He's a *gentleman,*' I said, 'and that's enough for *me!*'"

"Thank you, dear," answered Daisy, in a

failing voice. "I'm glad *you* didn't turn against me. It's bad enough without that."

"But what *has* happened?" she asked, drawing closer to his side. "Couldn't any of us help you? Couldn't papa advise you what to do?"

"*This* has happened, Norah," he answered gravely. "I am completely ruined. I have got nothing left in the world. Worse still, I am afraid I can scarce pay up all I've lost."

The spirit of her ancestors came into her eyes and bearing. Ruin to these, like personal danger, had never seemed a matter of great moment, so long as, at any sacrifice, honour might be preserved. She raised her head proudly, and looked straight in his face.

"The last *must* be done," said she. "*Must* be done, I'm telling you, Daisy, and *shall* be, if we sell the boots, you and me, off our very feet! How near can you get to what you owe for wagers and things? Of course, they'll have to be paid the first."

"If *everything* goes, I don't see my way to pay up all," he answered. "However, they *must* give me a little time. Where I'm to go, though, or what to do, is more than I can tell. But Norah, dear Norah! what I mind most is, that I mustn't hope to see *you* again!"

Her tears were falling fast. Her hands were busy with a locket she wore round her neck, the only article of value Norah possessed in the world. But the poor fingers trembled so, they failed to undo the strip of velvet on which it hung. At last she got it loose, and pressed it into his hand. "Take it, Daisy," said she, smiling with her wet eyes; "I don't value it a morsel. It was old Aunt Macormac gave it me on my birth-day. There's diamonds in it—not Irish, dear—and it's worth something, anyway, though not much. Ah, Daisy! now, if ye won't take it, I'll think ye never cared for me one bit!"

But Daisy stoutly refused to despoil her of this keepsake, though he begged hard, of course, for the velvet ribbon to which it was attached; and those who have ever found themselves in a like situation, will understand that he did not ask in vain.

So Miss Macormac returned to the Castle and the maternal wing, too late for luncheon; but thus far engaged to her ruined admirer, that while he vowed to come back the very moment his prospects brightened, and the "something" turned up which we all expect but so few of us experience—she promised, on her part, "never to marry (how could you think it now, Daisy!) nor so much as look at anybody else till she saw him again, if it wasn't for a hundred years!"

I am concerned to add that Mr. Sullivan's rod remained forgotten on the shingle, where it was eventually picked up by one of Mr. Macormac's keepers, but handled by its rightful owner no more. There was nothing to keep Daisy in Dublin now, and his funds were getting low. In less than twenty-four hours from his parting with Norah Macormac, he found himself crossing that wild district of Roscommon where he had bought the famous black mare that had so influenced his fortunes. Toiling, on an outside car, up the long ascent that led to the farmer's house, he could scarcely believe so short a time had elapsed since he visited the same place in the flush of youth and hope. He felt quite old and broken by comparison. Years count for little compared to events; and age is more a question of experience than of time. He had one consolation, however, and it lay in the shape of a narrow velvet ribbon next his heart.

Ere he had clasped the farmer's hand at his own gate, and heard his cheery, hospitable greeting, he wondered how he could feel so happy.

" I'm proud to see ye, Captain ! " said Denis, flourishing his hat round his head, as if it was a slip of blackthorn. " Proud am I an' pleased to see ye back again—an' that's the truth ! Ye're welcome, I tell ye ! Step in, now, an' take something at wanst. See, Captain, there's a two-year-old in that stable ; the very moral of your black mare. Ye never seen her likes for leppin' ! Ye'll try the baste this very afternoon, with the blessin'. I've had th' ould saddle mended, an' the stirrups altered to your length."

CHAPTER XX.

TAKING THE COLLAR.

THE General thought he had never been so happy in his life. His voice, his bearing, his very dress seemed to partake of the delusion that gilded existence. Springing down the steps of his Club, with more waist in his coat, more pretension in his hat, more agility in his gait than was considered usual, or even decorous, amongst its frequenters, no wonder they passed their comments freely enough on their old comrade, ridiculing or deploring his fate, according to the various opinions and temper of the conclave.

"What's up with St. Josephs now?" asked a white-whiskered veteran of his neighbour, whose bluff, weather-beaten face proclaimed him an Admiral of the Red. "He's turned quite flighty and queer of late. Nothing wrong *here*, is there?" and the speaker pointed a shaking finger to the apex of his own bald head.

"Not *there*, but *here*," answered the sailor, laying his remaining arm across his breast. "Going to be spliced, they tell me. Sorry for it. He's not a bad sort; and a smartish officer as I've heard, in *your* service."

"Pretty well—so, so. Nothing extraordinary for *that*," answered the first speaker, commonly called by irreverent juniors "Old Straps." "He hadn't much to do in India, I fancy; but he's been lucky, sir, lucky, and luck's the thing! Luck against the world, Admiral, by sea or land!"

"Well, his luck's over now, it seems," grunted the Admiral, whose views on matrimony appeared to differ from those of his profession in general. "I'm told he's been fairly hooked by that Miss Douglas. Black-eyed girl, with black hair—black, and all black, d—me!—and rides a black mare in the park. Hey! Why, she might be his daughter. How d'ye mean?"

"More fool he," replied "Straps," with a leer and a grin that disclosed his yellow tusks. "A fellow like St. Josephs ought to know better."

"I'm not so sure of that," growled the Admiral. "Gad, sir, if I was idiot enough to do the same thing, d'ye think I'd take a d—d old catamaran, that knew every move in the game? No, no, sir; youth and innocence, hey? A clean bill of health, a fair wind, and a pleasant voyage, you know!"

"In my opinion, there's devilish little youth left, and no innocence," answered "Straps." "If that's the girl, she's been hawked about, to my certain knowledge, for the last three seasons; and I suppose our friend is the only chance left—what we used to call a 'forlorn hope' when I was an ensign. He's got a little money, and they might give him a command. You never know what this Government will do. It's my belief they'd give that crossing-sweeper a command if they were only sure he was quite unfit for it."

"Command be d—d!" swore the Admiral. "He'll have enough to do to command his young wife. What? She's a lively craft, I'll be bound, with her black eyes. Carries a weather-helm, and steers as wild as you please in a sea-way. I'll tell you what it is—— Here, waiter! bring me the *Globe*. Why the —— are the evening papers so late?"

In the rush for those welcome journals, so long expected, so eagerly seized, all other topics were instantaneously submerged. Long before he could reach the end of the street, General St. Josephs was utterly forgotten by his brother officers and friends.

Still he *thought* he had never been so happy in his life. The word is used advisedly; for surely experience teaches us that real happiness consists in tranquillity and repose, in the slumber rather than the dream, in the lassitude that soothes the patient, not the fever-fit of which it is the result. Can a man be considered happy who is not comfortable? and how is comfort compatible with "anxiety, loss of appetite, nervous tremors, giddiness, involuntary blushing," and the many symptoms of disorder, which could be cured heretofore by advertisement, and which are the invariable accompaniments of an epidemic, invincible by pill or potion, and yielding only to the homœopathic treatment of marriage?

In this desperate remedy St. Josephs was anxious to experimentalise, and without delay. Yet his tact was supreme. Since the memorable walk in Kensington Gardens, when he had laid her under such heavy obligations, his demeanour had been more that of a friend than a lover—more, perhaps, that of a loyal and devoted subject to his sovereign mistress than either. She wondered why he never asked her, what she had done with all that money? Why, when she alluded to the subject, he winced and started as from a touch on a raw wound. Once she very nearly told him all. They were in a box at the Opera, so far unobserved that the couple who had accompanied them seemed wholly engrossed with each other. Satanella longed to make her confession—ease her conscience of its burden, perhaps, though such a thought was cruel and unjust—shake the yoke from off her neck. She had even got as far as, "I've never half thanked you, General——" when there came a tap at the box-door. Enter an irreproachable dandy, then a confusion of tongues, a laugh, a solo, injunctions to silence, and the opportunity was gone! Could she ever find courage to seek for it again?

Nevertheless, day by day she dwelt more on her admirer's forbearance, his care, his tenderness, his chivalrous devotion. Though he never pressed the point, it seemed an understood thing that they were engaged. She had forbidden him to visit her before luncheon, but he spent his afternoons in her drawing-room; and, on rare occasions, was admitted in the evening, when an elderly lady, supposed to be Blanche's cousin, came to act chaperone. The walks in Kensington Gardens had been discontinued. Her heart could not but smite her sometimes, to think that she never gave him but that one, when she wanted him to do her a favour.

Had he been more exacting she would have felt less self-reproach, but his patience and good humour cut her to the quick.

"You brute!" she would say, pushing her hair back, and frowning at her own handsome face in the glass. "You *worse* than brute!—unfeeling, unfeminine. I wish you were dead!—I wish you were dead!"

She had lost her rich colour now, and the hollow eyes were beginning to look very large and sad, under their black arching brows.

Perhaps it was the General's greatest delight to hear her sing. This indulgence she accorded him only of an evening, when the cousin invariably went to sleep, and her admirer sat in an arm-chair with the daily paper before his face. She insisted on this screen, and this attitude, never permitting him to stand by the pianoforte, nor turn over the leaves, nor undergo any exertion of mind or body that should break the charm. Who knows what golden visions gladdened the war-worn soldier's heart while he leaned back and listened, spell-bound by the tones he loved? Dreams of domestic happiness and peaceful joys, and a calm, untroubled future, when doubts and fears should be over, and he could make this glorious creature wholly and exclusively his own.

Did he ever wonder why in certain songs the dear voice thrilled with a sweetness akin to pain, ere it was drowned in a loud and brilliant accompaniment, that foiled the possibility of remonstrance, while the ditty was thrown aside to be replaced by another, less fraught, perhaps, with trying memories and associations? If so, he hazarded no remark nor conjecture, satisfied, as it seemed, to wait her pleasure, and in all things bow his will to hers, sacrificing his desires, his pride, his very self-respect to the woman he adored.

For a time nothing occurred to disturb the General's enforced tranquillity, and he pursued the course he seemed to have marked out for himself with a calm perseverance that deserved success. In public, people glanced and whispered when they saw Miss Douglas on his arm; in private, he called daily at her house, talked much small-talk, and drank a great deal of weak tea; while in solitude he asked himself how long this probation was to last, resolving nevertheless to curb his impatience, control his temper, and if the prize was only to be won by waiting, wait for it to the end!

Leaving his Club, then, unconscious of the

Admiral's pity and the sarcasms of "Old Straps," St. Josephs walked jauntily through Mayfair, till he came to the well-known street, which seemed to him now even as a glade in Paradise. The crossing-sweeper blessed him with considerable emphasis, brushing energetically in his path; for when going the General was invariably good for sixpence, and on propitious days would add thereto a shilling as he returned.

On the present occasion, though his hand was in his pocket, it remained there with the coin in its finger and thumb; for the wayfarer stopped petrified in the middle of the street; the sweeper held his tattered hat at arm's-length, motionless as a statue; and a bare-headed butcher's-boy, standing erect in a light cart, pulled his horse on its haunches, and called out—

"Now then, stoopid! d'ye want all the road to yerself?" grazing the old officer's coat-tails as he drove by with a brutal laugh.

But neither irreverence nor outrage served to divert the General's attention from the sight that so disturbed his equanimity.

"There's that d——d black mare again!" he muttered, while he clenched his teeth, and his cheek turned pale. "I'll put a stop to this one way or the other. Steady, steady! No; my game is to be won by pluck and patience. It's very near the end now. Shall I lose it by failing in both?"

The black mare, looking but little the worse for training, was indeed in the act of leaving Blanche's door. Miss Douglas had evidently ridden her that morning in the Park. She might have told the General, he thought. She might have asked him to accompany her as he used. She ought to have no secrets from him now; but was he in truth any nearer her inner life, any more familiar with her dearest thoughts and wishes than he had been months ago? Surely she was not treating him well! Surely he deserved more confidence than this. The General felt very sore and angry; but summoning all his self-command, walked up-stairs —and for this he deserves no little credit—with an assured step, and a calm, unruffled brow.

"Miss Douglas was dressing," the servant said. "Miss Douglas had been out for a ride. Would the General take a seat, and look at to-day's paper? Miss Douglas had said '*partic'lar*' she would be at home."

It was irritating to wait, but it was soothing to know she was at home "*partic'lar*" when *he* called. The General sat down to peruse the advertisement sheet of the paper, reading absently a long and laudatory description of the trousseaux and other articles for family use supplied by a certain house in the City at less than cost price!

CHAPTER XXI.

A SNAKE IN THE GRASS.

HIS studies were soon interrupted by the rustle of a dress on the staircase. With difficulty he forbore from rushing out to meet its wearer, but managed to preserve the composure of an ordinary morning visitor, when the door opened, and—enter Mrs. Lushington!

She must have read his disappointment in his face; for she looked half-amused, half-provoked, and there was no less malice than mirth in her eyes while she observed—

"Blanche will be down directly, General, and don't be afraid I shall interrupt your *tête-à-tête*, for I am going away as soon as I've written a note. You can rehearse all the charming things you have got to say in the meantime."

He had recovered his *savoir-faire*.

"Rehearse them to *you?*" he asked, laughing. "It would be pretty practice, no doubt. Shall I begin?"

"Not now," she answered, in the same tone. "There is hardly time; though Blanche wouldn't be very cross about it, I dare say.

She is liberal enough, and knows she can trust *me*."

"I am sure you are a true friend," he returned gravely. "Miss Douglas—Blanche—has not too many. I hope you will always remain one of her staunchest and best."

She smiled sadly.

"Do you *really* mean it?" said she, taking his hand. "You can't imagine how happy it makes me to hear you say so. I thought you considered me a vain, ignorant, frivolous little woman, like the rest."

Perhaps he did, but this was not the moment to confess it.

"What a strange world it would be," he answered, "if we knew the real opinions of our friends! In this case, Mrs. Lushington, you see how wrong you were about mine."

"I believe you, General!" she exclaimed. "I feel that you are truth itself. I am sure you never deceived a woman in your life, and I *cannot* understand how any woman could find it in her heart to deceive *you*. One ought never to forgive such an offence, and I can believe that *you* never would."

He thought her earnestness unaccountable, and wholly uncalled for; but his senses were on the alert to catch the first symptoms of Blanche's approach, and he answered rather absently—

"Quite right! Of course not. Double-dealing is *the* thing I hate. You may cheat me once; that is *your* fault. It is my own if you ever take me in again."

"No wonder Blanche values your good opinion," said Mrs. Lushington meaningly. "She has not spent her life amongst people whose standard is so high. Hush! here she comes. Ah! General, you won't care about talking to *me* now!"

She gave him one reproachful glance in which there was a little merriment, a little pique, and a great deal of tender interest, ere she departed to write her note in the back drawing-room.

It was impossible not to contrast her kind and deferential manner with the cold, collected bearing of Miss Douglas, who entered the room, like a queen about to hold her court, rather than a loving maiden, hurrying to meet her lord.

She had always been remarkable for quiet dignity, in motion or repose.

It was one of the many charms on which the General lavished his admiration, but he could have dispensed with this royal composure now. It seemed a little out of place in their relative positions. Also, he would have liked to see the colour deepen in her proud, impassive face, though his honest heart ached while he reflected how the bright tints had faded of late, how the glory of her beauty had departed, leaving her always pale and saddened now.

He would have asked a leading question, hazarded a gentle reproach, or in some way made allusion to the arrival of his *bête noir*, but her altered looks disarmed him; and it was Satanella herself who broached the subject, by quietly informing her visitor she had just returned from riding the black mare in the Park. "Do you *mind?*" she added, rising in some confusion to pull a blind down, while she spoke.

Here would have been an opportunity for a confession of jealousy, an appeal to her feelings, pleadings, promises, protestations,—to use the General's own metaphor,—"an attack along the whole line;" but how was he thus to offer battle, with his flank exposed and threatened, with Mrs. Lushington's ears wide open and attentive, while her pen went scribble, scribble, almost in the same room?

"I *mind* everything you do," said he gallantly, "and object to nothing! If I *did* want to get up a grievance, I should quarrel with you for not ordering me to parade in attendance on you in the Park. My time, as you know, is always yours, and I am never so happy as with you. Blanche"—(dropping his voice)—"I am never *really* happy when you are out of my sight."

She glanced towards the writing-table, and though the folding doors, half-shut, concealed that lady's person, seemed glad to observe, by the continual scratching of a pen, that Mrs. Lushington had not yet finished her note.

"You are always good and kind," said Blanche, forcing a smile. "Far more than I deserve. Will you ride another day, early? Thanks; I knew you would. I should have asked you this morning, but I had a head-ache, and thought I should only be a bore. Besides, I expected you in the afternoon. Then Clara came to luncheon, and we went up-stairs, and now the carriage will be round in five minutes. That is the way the day goes by; yet it seems very long too, only not so bad as the night."

Again his face fell. It was up-hill work, he thought. Surely women were not usually so difficult to woo, or his own memory played him false, and his friends romanced unpardonably in their narratives. But, nevertheless, in all the prizes of life that which seemed fairest and best hung highest out of reach, and he would persevere to the end. Ay! even if he should fail at last!

Miss Douglas seemed to possess some intuitive knowledge of his intention, and conscious of his determination to overcome them, was perhaps the more disposed to throw difficulties in his path. He should have remembered that in love as in war, a rapid flank movement and complete change of tactics will often prevail, when vigilance, endurance, and honest courage have been tried in vain.

Satanella could not but appreciate a delicacy that forbade further inquiry about the black mare. No sooner had she given vent to her feelings, in the little explosion recorded above, than she bitterly regretted their expression, comparing her wayward, petulant disposition with the temper and constancy displayed by her admirer. Sorrowful, softened, filled with self-reproach, she gave him one of her winning smiles, and bade him forgive her display of ill-humour, or bear with it, as one of many evil qualities, the result of her morbid temperament and isolated lot.

"Then I slept badly, and went out tired. The Ride was crowded, the sun broiling, the mare disagreeable. Altogether, I came back as cross as two sticks. General, are *you* never out of humour? And how do you get rid of your ill-tempers? You certainly don't visit them on *me!*"

"How *could* I?" he asked in return. "How can I ever be anything but your servant, your slave? Oh! Blanche, you must believe me *now*. How much longer is my probation to last? Is the time to be always put off from day to day, and must I——"

"Clara! Clara!" exclaimed Miss Douglas to her friend in the back drawing-room, "shall you never have done with those tiresome letters? Have you any idea what o'clock it is? And the carriage was ordered at five!"

The General smothered a curse. It was invariably so. No sooner did he think he had gained a secure footing, wrested a position of advantage, than she cut the ground from under him, pushed him down the hill, and his labour was lost, his task all to begin again! It seemed as if she could not bear to face her real position, glancing off at a tangent, without the slightest compunction, from the one important topic he was constantly watching an opportunity to broach.

"Just done! and a good day's work too!" replied Mrs. Lushington's silver tones from the writing-table, and it must have been a quicker ear than either Satanella's or the General's to detect in that playful sentence the spirit of mischievous triumph it conveyed.

Mrs. Lushington was delighted. She felt sure she had fathomed a secret, discovered the clue to an intrigue, and by such means as seemed perfectly fair and justifiable to her warped sense of right and wrong.

Finding herself the third person in a small party that should have been limited to two, she made urgent correspondence her excuse for withdrawing to such a distance as might admit of overhearing their conversation, while the lovers, if lovers indeed they were, should think themselves unobserved.

So she opened Satanella's blotting-book, and spread a sheet of note-paper on its folds.

Mrs. Lushington had a quick eye, no less than a ready wit. Blanche's blotting-paper was of the best quality, soft, thick, and absorbent. Where the writing-book opened, so shrewd an observer did not fail to detect the words "Roscommon, Ireland," traced clear and distinct as a lithograph, though reversed. Looking through the page, against the light, she read Daisy's address in his hiding-place with his humble friend Denis, plainly enough, and the one word "Registered" underlined at the corner.

"*Enfin je te pince!*" she muttered below her breath. It was evident Satanella was in Daisy's confidence, that she knew his address,—which had been extorted indeed with infinite trouble from a lad whom he sent to England in charge of the precious mare,—and had written to him within the last day or two. It was a great discovery! Her hand shook from sheer excitement, while she considered how best it could be turned to account, how it might serve to wean the General of his infatuation, to detach him from her friend, perhaps at last to secure him for herself. But she must proceed cautiously; make every step good as she went on; prove each link of the chain while she forged it; and when Blanche was fairly in the toils, show her the usual mercy extended by one woman to another.

Of course, she wrote her notes on a fresh page of the blotting-book. Of course, she rose from her employment frank, smiling, unsuspicious. Of course, she was more than usually affectionate to Blanche; and that young lady, well-skilled in the wiles of her own sex, wondering what had happened, watched her friend's conduct with some anxiety and yet more contempt.

"Good-bye, Blanche."

"Good-bye, Clara."

"Come again soon, dear!"

"You may depend upon me, love!"

And they kissed each other with a warmth of affection in no way damped or modified because Blanche suspected, and Clara resolved, henceforth it must be war to the knife!

In taking her leave of the General, however, Mrs. Lushington could not resist an allusion to their previous conversation, putting into her manner so much of tender regard and respectful interest as was pleasing enough to him and inexpressibly galling to her friend.

"Have you said your say?" she asked, looking very pretty and good-humoured as she gave him both hands. "I'm sure you had lots of time, and the best of opportunities. Don't you think I'm very considerate?"

"More—very generous."

"Come and see me soon. Whenever you like. With or without dear Blanche. She won't mind; I'm always at home, to either of you—or both."

Then she made a funny little courtesy, gave him one more smile, one sidelong sorrowful glance, with her hand on the door, and was gone.

Blanche's spirit rose to arms; every instinct of her sex urged her to resist this unconscionable freebooter, this lawless professor of piracy and annexation. After all, whether she cared for him or not, the General was her own property. And what right had this woman to come between mistress and servant, with her becks and leers, her smiles and wiles, and meretricious ways? She had never valued her lover higher than at the moment Mrs. Lushington left the room; but he destroyed his advantage, kicked down all his good fortune, by looking in Miss Douglas's face with an expression of slavish devotion, while he exclaimed—

"How different that woman is from you, Blanche! Surely, my queen, there is nobody like you in the world!"

CHAPTER XXII.

AN EXPERT.

RETURNING from morning stables to his barrack-room, Soldier Bill found on his table a document that puzzled him exceedingly. He read it a dozen times, turned it upside down, smoothed it out with his riding-whip, all in vain. He could make nothing of it; then he summoned Barney.

"When did this thing come, and who brought it?"

"Five minutes back," answered the bâtman. "Left by a young man on fatigue duty."

So Barney, with military exactitude, described a government official, in the costume of its telegraphic department.

"Did the man leave no message?" continued Bill.

"Said as there was nothing to pay," answered Barney, standing at "attention," and obviously considering this part of his communication satisfactory in the extreme.

"Said there was nothing to pay!" mused his master, "and I would have given him a guinea to explain any two words of it." Then he took his coat off, and sat doggedly down to read the mysterious sentences again and again.

The soldier, as he expressed it, was "up a tree!" From its mode of transmission, he argued that the message must be of importance. The sender's name was legible enough, and his own address perfectly correct. He felt sure Daisy would not have telegraphed from the wilds of Roscommon, but on a matter of urgency; and it did seem provoking that the only sense to be got out of the whole composition was in the sentence with which it concluded—"Do not lose a moment." In his perplexity, he could think of no one so likely to help him as Mrs. Lushington.

"She has more 'nous' in that pretty little head of hers," thought Bill, as he plunged into a suit of plain clothes, "than the Horse Guards and the War Office put together. *She'll* knock the marrow out of this, if anybody can! I've heard her guess riddles right off, the first time she heard them; and there isn't her equal in London for acting charades and games of that kind, where you must be down to it before they can say 'knife.' By Jove, I shouldn't wonder if this was a double acrostic after all! Only Daisy wouldn't be such a flat as to telegraph it all the way from Ireland to *me*. I hope she'll see me. It's awfully early. I wonder if she'll blow me up for coming so soon."

These reflections, and Catamount's thoroughbred canter, soon brought him to Mrs. Lushington's door. She was at home, and sufficiently well prepared for exercises of ingenuity, having been engaged, after breakfast,—though it is but fair to say such skirmishes were of unusual occurrence,—in a passage-of-arms with Frank.

The latter was a good-*natured* man with a bad *temper*. His wife's temper was excellent; but her enemies, and indeed her friends, said she was ill-*natured*. Though scarcely to be called an attached couple, these two seldom found it worth while to quarrel, and so long as the selfishness of each did not clash with the other, they jogged on quietly enough. It was only when domestic affairs threw them together more than common that the contact elicited certain sparks, such as crackled on occasion into what observers below-stairs called a "flare-up."

To day they happened to breakfast together. After a few "back-handers," and some rapid exchanges, in which the husband came by the worst, their conversation turned on money-matters—always a sore subject, as each considered that the other spent more than a due share of their joint income. Complaints led to recriminations, until at length, goaded by the sharpness of his wife's tongue, Mr. Lushington exclaimed—"Narrow-minded, indeed! Paltry economy! I can tell you, if I didn't keep a precious tight hand, and deny myself—well—lots of things. I say if I didn't deny myself *lots* of things, I should be in the Bench—that's all!"

"Then you are a very bad financier," she retorted; "worse than the Chancellor of the Exchequer. But I don't believe it. I believe you're saving money every day."

He rose from his chair in a transport of irritation, the skirts of his dressing-gown floating round him like the rags of a whirling dervish.

"Saving money!" he repeated, in a sort of suppressed scream. "I can only tell you I had to borrow five hundred last week, and from little Sharon too. That doesn't mean getting it at three per cent.!"

"Then you ought to be ashamed of yourself!" said she. "No gentleman borrows money from Sharon."

"No gentleman!" he vociferated. "Upon my life, Mrs. Lushington, I wish you would try to be more temperate in your language. No gentleman, indeed! I should like to know what you call General St. Josephs? I fancy he is rather a favourite of yours. All I can tell you is, *he* borrows money of Sharon. Lumps of money, at exorbitant interest."

"It's very easy to *say* these things," she replied. "But you can't prove them!"

"Can't I?" was his rejoinder. "Well, I suppose you won't doubt my word when I give you my honour, that he consulted me himself about a loan from this very man. Three thousand pounds, Mrs. Lushington—three thousand pounds sterling, and at two days' notice. Didn't care what he paid for it, and wanted it—Well, *I* didn't ask him why he wanted it—*I* don't pry into other people's money-matters. *I* don't always think the worst of my neighbours. But you'll allow I'm right, I hope. You'll admit so much, at any rate."

"That has nothing to do with it," replied his wife; and in this highly satisfactory manner their matrimonial bicker terminated.

Mrs. Lushington, while remaining, in a modified sense, mistress of the position—for Frank retired to his own den, when the servants came to take away breakfast—found her curiosity keenly stimulated by the little piece of gossip thus let fall under the excitement of a conjugal wrangle. What on earth could St. Josephs want with three thousand pounds? She had never heard he was a gambler. On a racecourse, she knew, from personal observation, that beyond a few half-crowns with the ladies, he would not venture a shilling. He had told her repeatedly how he abhorred foreign loans, joint-stock companies, lucrative investments of all sorts, and money speculations of any kind whatever; yet here, if she believed her husband, was this wise and cautious veteran plunging overhead in a transaction wholly out of keeping with his character and habits. "There *must* be a woman at the bottom of it!" thought Mrs. Lushington, not unreasonably, resolving at the same time never to rest till she had sifted the whole mystery from beginning to end.

She felt so keen on her quest, that she could even have found it in her heart to seek Frank in his own snuggery, and, sinking her dignity, there endeavour to worm out of him further particulars, when Catamount was pulled up with some difficulty at her door, and his master's card sent in, accompanied by a humble petition that the early visitor might be admitted. Having darkened her eyelashes just before breakfast, and being, moreover, dressed in an unusually becoming morning toilet, she returned a favourable answer, so that Soldier Bill, glowing from his ride, was ushered into her boudoir without delay.

Her womanly tact observed his fussed and anxious looks. She assumed, therefore, an air of interest and gravity in her own.

"There's some bother," said she kindly; "I see it in your face. How can I help you, and what can I do?"

"You're a conjuror, by Jove!" gasped Bill, in a paroxysm of admiration at her omniscience.

"*You're* not, at any rate!" she replied, smiling. "But, come, tell me all about it. You're in a scrape? You've been a naughty boy. What have you been doing? Out with it!"

"It's nothing of my own; I give you my honour," replied Bill. "It's Daisy's turn now. Look here, Mrs. Lushington. I'm completely puzzled—regularly knocked out of time. Read that. I can't make head or tail of it."

He handed her the telegram, which she perused in silence, then burst out laughing, and read it again aloud for his edification:—

"*Very strong Honey just arrived—bulls a-light on Bank of Ireland—Sent by an unknown*

Fiend—fail immediately—Sell Chief—consult a Gent, and strip Aaron at once—Do not lose a moment."

"Mr. Walters must be gone raving mad, or is this a practical joke? and why do you bring it here?"

"I don't think it's a joke," answered Bill ruefully. "I brought it because you know everything. If *you* can't help me, I'm done!"

"Quite right," said she. "Always consult a woman in a tangle. Now this thing is just like a skein of silk. If we can't unravel it at one end, we begin at the other. In the first place, who is Aaron? and how would you proceed to strip him?"

"Aaron?" repeated Bill thoughtfully; "Aaron? I never heard of such a person. There's Sharon, you know; but stripping *him* would be out of the question. It's generally all the other way!"

"Sharon's a money-lender, isn't he?" she asked. "What business have *you* to know anything about him, you wicked young man!"

"Never borrowed a sixpence in my life," protested Bill, which was perfectly true. "But I've been to him often enough lately about this business of Daisy's. We've arranged to get fifteen hundred from *him* alone. Perhaps that is what is meant by stripping him. But it was all to be in hard money; and though I know Sharon sometimes makes you take goods, I never heard of his sending a fellow bulls or strong honey, or, indeed, anything but dry sherry and cigars."

She knit her brows and read the message again. "I think I have it," said she. '*Strip Aaron*,'—that must mean 'Stop Sharon.' '*Sell the Chief*,'—that's 'tell the Colonel.' Then '*fail immediately*' signifies that the writer means to cross by the first boat. Where does it come from—Dublin or Roscommon?"

"Roscommon," answered Bill. "They're not much in the habit of telegraphing up there."

"Depend upon it Daisy has dropped into a good thing. Somebody must have left, or lent, or *given* him a lot of money. I have it! I have it! This is how you must read it," she exclaimed, and following the lines with her taper finger, she put them into sense with no little exultation, for the benefit of her admiring listener. "'Very strange! Money just arrived. Bills at sight, on Bank of Ireland. Sent by an unknown Friend. Sail immediately. Tell Chief. Consult Agent, and stop Sharon at once. Do not lose a moment.' There, sir, should I, or should I not, make a good expert at the Bank?"

"You're a witch—simply a witch," returned the delighted Bill. "It's regular, downright magic. Of course, that's what he means. Of course, he's come into a fortune. Hurrah! hurrah! Mrs. Lushington, have you any objection? I should like to throw my hat in the street, please, and put my head out of window to shout!"

"I beg you'll put out nothing of the kind!" she answered, laughing. "If you must be a boy, at least be a good boy, and do what I tell you."

"I should think I *would* just!" he protested, still in his paroxysm of admiration. "You know more than the examiners at Sandhurst! You could give *pounds* to the senior department! If you weren't so—I mean if you were old and ugly—I should really believe what I said at first, that you're a witch!"

She smiled on him in a very bewitching manner; but her brains were hard at work the while recapitulating all she had learned in the last twenty-four hours, with a pleasant conviction that she had put her puzzle together at last. Yes, she saw it clearly now. The registered envelope of which she found the address, in reverse, on Blanche's blotting-paper must have contained those very bills mentioned in Daisy's telegram. It had struck her at the time that the handwriting was stiff and formal, as if disguised; but this served to account for the mysterious announcement of an "unknown fiend!" She was satisfied that Miss Douglas had sent anonymously the sum he wanted to the man she loved. And that sum Bill had already told her was three thousand pounds—exactly the amount, according to her husband's version, lately borrowed by the General from a notorious money-lender. Was it possible Satanella could thus have stripped one admirer to benefit another? It must be so. Such treachery deserved no mercy, and Mrs. Lushington determined to show none.

She considered how far her visitor might be trusted with this startling discovery. It was as well, she thought, that he should be at least partially enlightened, particularly as the transaction was but little to the credit of any one concerned, and could not, therefore, be made public too soon. So she laid her hand on Bill's coat-sleeve, and observed impressively—

"Never mind about my being old and ugly, but attend to what I say. Daisy, as you call him, has evidently found a good friend. Now, I know who that friend is. Don't ask me how I found it out. I never speak without being sure. That money came from Miss Douglas."

Bill opened his eyes and mouth. "Miss Douglas!" he repeated. "Not the black girl with the black mare!"

"The black girl with the black mare, and no other," she answered. "Miss Douglas has paid his debts, and saved him from ruin. What return can a man make for such generosity as that?"

"She's a trump, and he ought to marry her!" exclaimed the young officer. "No great sacrifice either. Only," he added, on reflection, "she looks a bit of a Tartar—wants her head let quite alone at her fences, I should think. She'd be rather a handful; but Daisy wouldn't mind that. Yes; he's bound to marry her, no doubt; and I'll see him through it."

"I quite agree with you," responded Mrs. Lushington, "but I won't have you talk about ladies as if they were hunters. It's bad style, young gentleman, so don't do it again. Now, attend to what I tell you. Jump on that poor horse of yours; it must be very tired of staring into my dining-room windows. Go to your agent, and send *him* to Sharon. Let your Colonel know at once. When Daisy arrives, impress on him all that he is bound in honour to do, and you may come and see me again, whenever you like, to report progress."

So Bill leapt into the saddle in exceedingly good spirits, while Mrs. Lushington sat down to her writing-table, with the self-satisfied sensations of one who has performed an action of provident kindness and good-will.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE DEBT OF HONOUR.

DAISY'S astonishment, on receiving by post those documents that restored him to the world from his vegetation in Roscommon, was no less unbounded than his joy. When he opened the registered letter, and bills for the whole amount of his liabilities fluttered out, he could scarcely believe his eyes. Then he puzzled himself to no purpose, in wild speculations as to the friend who had thus dropped from the skies at his utmost need. He had an uncle prosperous enough in worldly matters, but this uncle hated parting with his money, and was, moreover, abroad, whereas the welcome letter bore a London post-mark. He could think of no other relative nor friend rich enough, even if willing, to assist him in so serious a difficulty. The more he considered his good luck, the more inexplicable it appeared; nor, taking his host into consultation, did that worthy's suggestions tend to elucidate the mystery.

In the first place, recalling many similar instances under his own observation, Denis opined that the money must have been hidden up for his guest, long ago, by his great grandmother, in a stocking, and forgotten! Next, that the Prussian Government, having heard of the mare's performances at Punchestown, had bought her for breeding purposes, at such a sum as they considered her marketable value. And, lastly (standing the more stoutly by this theory, for the failure of its predecessors), that the whole amount had been subscribed under a general vote of the Kildare Street Club, in testimony of their admiration for Daisy's bold riding and straightforward conduct as a sportsman!

Leaving him perfectly satisfied with this explanation, Daisy bid his host an affectionate farewell, and started without delay for London, previously telegraphing to his comrade at Kensington certain information and instructions for his guidance. Warped in its transmission by an imaginative clerk in a hurry, we have seen how this message confused and distracted the honest perceptions of its recipient.

That young officer was sitting down to breakfast, with Venus under his chair, while Benjamin, the badger, poked a cautious nose out of his stronghold in the wardrobe, when the hasty retreat of one animal, and formidable growlings of the other, announced a strange step on the stairs. Immediately Daisy rushed into the room, vociferated for Barney to look after his "traps" and pay the cab, seized a hot plate, wagged his head at his host, and began breakfast without further ceremony.

"Seem peckish, young man," observed Bill, contemplating his friend with extreme satisfaction. "Sick as a fool last night, no doubt, and sharp-set this morning in consequence. Go in for a cutlet, my boy. Another kidney, then. That's right. Have a suck of the lemon, and at him again!"

Munching steadily, Daisy repudiated the imputation of sea-sickness, with the scorn of a practised mariner. "It seems to me that I live on that Channel," said he, "like a ship's-steward, Bill, or a horse-marine! Well, I've done with it now, I hope, for some time. How jolly it is to feel straight again! It's like your horse getting up, when he's been on his head, without giving you the crowner you deserve. It was touch-and-go this time, old chap. I say, you got my telegram?"

Bill laughed. "I did, indeed!" he answered; "and a nice mull they made. Read it for yourself."

Thus speaking, he tossed across the breakfast-table that singular communication which his unassisted ingenuity had so failed to comprehend.

Daisy perused it with no little astonishment. "The fools!" he exclaimed. "Why, Bill, you must have thought I'd gone mad."

"We *did*," replied Bill gravely. "Stark staring, my boy. We said we always *had* considered you 'a hatter,' but not so bad as this."

"*We!*" repeated his friend. "What d'ye mean by *we?* You didn't go jawing about it in the regiment, Bill?"

"When I say we," answered the other, with something of a blush, "I mean me and Mrs. Lushington."

"What had *she* to do with it?" asked Daisy, pushing his plate away, and lighting a cigar. "*She* didn't send the stuff, I'll take my oath!"

"But she knows who did," said Bill, filling a meerschaum pipe of liberal dimensions, with profound gravity.

Then they smoked in silence for several minutes.

"It's a very rum go," observed Daisy, after a prolonged and thoughtful puff. "I don't know when I've been so completely at fault. Tell me what you've heard, Bill, for you *have* heard something, I'm sure. In the first place, how came you to take counsel with Mrs. Lushington?"

"Because she is up to every move in the game," was the answer. "Because she's the cleverest woman in London, and the nicest. Because I was regularly beat, and could think of nobody else to help me at short notice. The telegram said, 'Do not lose a moment.'"

"And what did *she* make of it?" asked Daisy.

"Tumbled to the whole plant in three minutes," answered Bill. "Put the telegram straight—bulls, honey, and all—as easy as wheeling into line. I tell you, we know as much as you do now, and *more*. You've got three 'thou,' Daisy, ready-money down, to do what you like with. Isn't that right?"

Daisy nodded assent.

"The Chief's delighted, and I've sent the agent to Sharon. Luckily, the little beggar's not so unreasonable as we thought he'd be. That reckons up the telegram, doesn't it?"

Again Daisy nodded, smoking serenely.

"Then there's nothing more for you to bother about," continued his host; "and I'm glad of it. Only, next time, Daisy, you won't pull for an old woman, I fancy, in a winning race."

"Nor a young one either," said his friend. "But you haven't told me now who the money came from."

"Can't you guess? Have you no idea?"

"Not the faintest."

"What should you say to Miss Douglas?"

"Miss Douglas!"

By the tone in which Daisy repeated her name, that young lady was obviously the last person in the world from whom he expected to receive pecuniary assistance.

Though no longer peaceful, his meditations seemed deeper than ever. At length he threw away the end of his cigar with a gesture of impatience and vexation.

"This is a very disagreeable business," said he. "Hang it, Bill, I almost wish the money had never come. I can't send it back, for a thousand's gone already to our kind old major, who promised to settle my book at Tattersall's. I wonder where she got such a sum. By Jove, it's the handsomest thing I ever heard of! What would you do, Bill, if you were in my place?"

"Do," repeated his friend; "I've no doubt what I should *do.* I should order Catamount round at once; then I think I'd have a brandy-and-soda; in ten minutes I'd be at Miss Douglas's door, and in fifteen I'd have—what d'ye call it?—proposed to her. Proposed to her, my boy, all according to regulation. I'm not sure how you set about these things. I fancy you go down on your knees; I know you ought to put your arm round their waists; but lots of fellows could coach you for all that part, and even if you did anything that's not in the book, this is a case of emergency, and, in my opinion, you might chance it!"

Having thus delivered himself, the speaker assumed a judicial air, smoking severely.

"In plain English, a woman buys one for three thousand pounds!" said Daisy, laughing rather bitterly. "*And only three thousand bid for him. Going! Going!!*"

"*Gone!!!*" added Bill, bringing his fist down on the table with a bang that startled the badger, and elicited an angry bark from Venus. "A deuced good price, too! I only hope I shall fetch half as much when I'm brought to the hammer. Why you ought to be delighted, my good fellow. She's as handsome as paint, and the best horsewoman that ever wore a habit!"

"I don't deny her riding, nor her beauty, nor her merit in every way," said Daisy, somewhat ruefully. "In fact, she's much too good for a fellow like me. But do you mean seriously, Bill, that I must marry her because she has paid my debts?"

"I do, indeed," answered his friend; "and Mrs. Lushington thinks so too."

Before Daisy's eyes rose the vision of an Irish river glancing in the sunshine, with banks of tender green and ripples of molten gold, and a fishing-rod lying neglected on its margin, while a fair, fond face looked loving and trustful in his own.

There are certain hopes akin to the child's soap-bubble which we cherish insensibly, admiring their airy grace and radiant colouring, almost persuading ourselves of their reality, till we apply to them some practical test—then behold! at a touch, the bubble bursts, the dream vanishes, to leave us only a vague sense of injustice, an uncomfortable consciousness of disappointment and disgust.

"I conclude Mrs. Lushington understands these things, and knows exactly what a fellow ought to do," said Daisy, after another pause that denoted he was in no indiscreet hurry to act on that lady's decision.

"Of course she does!" answered Bill. "She's a regular authority, you know, or I wouldn't have gone to her. You couldn't be in safer hands."

Both young men seemed to look on the whole transaction in the light of a duel, or some such affair of honour, requiring caution no less than courage, and in the conduct of which the opinion of a celebrated practitioner like Mrs. Lushington was invaluable and unimpeachable.

"But if I—if I don't like her well enough," said poor Daisy, looking very uncomfortable. "Hang it, Bill, when one marries a woman, you know, one's obliged to be always with her. Early breakfast, home to luncheon, family dinner, smoke out of doors, and in by ten o'clock. I shouldn't like it at all; and then perhaps she'd take me to morning visits and croquet parties. Think of that, Bill! Like poor Martingale, whose only holiday is when he gets the belt on, and can't stir out of barracks for four-and-twenty hours. To be sure, Miss Douglas is a good many cuts above Mrs. Martingale!"

"To be sure she is!" echoed his adviser. "And I dare say, after all, Daisy, it is not quite so bad as we think. Wet days and that you'd have to yourself, you know, and she wouldn't want you when she had a headache. Mrs. Martingale often has headaches, and so should I if I liquored up as freely!"

"But supposing," argued Daisy, "I say only *supposing*, Bill, one liked another girl better; oughtn't that to make a difference?"

"I'm afraid *not*," replied Bill, shaking his head. "I didn't think of putting the case in that way to Mrs. Lushington, but I don't imagine she'd admit the objection. No, no, my boy, it's no use being shifty about it. You've got to jump, and the longer you look, the less you'll like it! If it was a mere matter of business, I wouldn't say a word, but see how the case stands. There are no receipts, no vouchers; she has kept everything dark, that you might feel under no obligation. Hang it, old fellow, it's a regular debt of honour; and there's no way of paying up, that I can see, but this."

Such an argument was felt to be unanswerable.

"A debt of honour," repeated Daisy. "I suppose it is. Very well; I'll set about it at once. I can't begin to-day though."

"Why not?" asked his friend.

"No time," answered the other, who, in many respects, was a true Englishman. "I've got lots of things to do. In the first place, I must have my hair cut, of course."

CHAPTER XXIV.

A PERTINENT QUESTION.

A LETTER, without date or signature, written in an upright, clerkly hand, correctly spelt, sufficiently well-expressed, and stamped at the General Post Office! St. Josephs had no clue to his correspondent, and could but read the following production over and over again with feelings of irritation and annoyance that increased at each perusal:—

"You have been ill-treated and deceived. A sense of justice compels the writer of these lines to warn you before it is too late. You are the victim of a conspiracy to plunder and defraud. One cannot bear to see a man of honour robbed by the grossest foul play. General St. Josephs is not asked to believe a bare and unsupported statement. Let him recapitulate certain facts, and judge for himself. He best knows whether he did not lately borrow a large sum of money. He can easily discover if that amount corresponds, to a fraction, with the losses of a young officer celebrated for his horsemanship. Let him ascertain why that person's debts have stood over till now; also, how and when they have been settled. Will he have courage to ask himself, or *somebody* he trusts as himself, whence came these funds that have placed his rival in a position to return to England? Will he weigh the answer in the balance of common sense; or is he so infatuated by a certain dark lady that he can be fooled with his eyes open, in full light of day? There is no time to lose, or this caution would never have been given. If neglected, the General will regret his incredulity as long as he lives. Most women would appreciate his admiration; many would be more than proud of his regard. There is but one, perhaps, in the world who could thus repay it by injury and deceit. He is entreated to act at once on this communication, and to believe that of all his well-wishers it comes from the sincerest and the most reliable."

Everybody affects to despise anonymous letters. No doubt it is a wise maxim that such communications should be put in the fire at once, and ignored as if they did not exist. Nevertheless, on the majority of mankind they inflict unreasonable anxiety and distress. The sting rankles, though the insect be infinitesimal and contemptible; the blow falls none the less severely that it has been delivered in the dark.

On a nature like the General's such an epistle as the above was calculated to produce the utmost amount of impatience and discomfort. To use a familiar expression, it *worried* him beyond measure. Straightforward in all his dealings, he felt utterly at a loss when he came in contact with mystery or deceit. Nothing could furnish plainer proof of the General's sincere attachment to Miss Douglas than the fortitude with which he confronted certain petty vexations and annoyances inseparable from the love affairs of young and old.

> "Ah me! what perils do environ,
> The man who meddles with cold iron,"

quoth Hudibras; but surely his risk is yet greater, who elects to heat the metal from hilt to point, in the furnace of his own affections, and burns his fingers every time he draws the sword, even in self-defence. To St. Josephs who, after a manhood of hardship, excitement, and some military renown, had arrived at a time of life when comfort and repose are more appreciated, and more desirable every day, nothing could have been so distasteful as the character he now chose to enact, but for her charms, who had cast the part for him, and with whom, by dint of perseverance and fidelity, he hoped to play out the play.

Though he often sighed to remember how heavily he was weighted with his extra burden of years, he never dreamed of retiring from the contest, nor relaxed for one moment in his efforts to attain the goal.

Twenty times was he on the point of destroying a letter that so annoyed him, and twenty times he checked himself, with the reflection, that even this treacherous weapon might be wrested from the enemy, and turned to his own advantage by sincerity and truth. After much cogitation, he ordered his horse, dressed himself carefully, and rode to Miss Douglas's door.

That lady was at home. Luncheon, coming out of the dining-room untouched, met him as he crossed the hall, and the tones of her pianoforte rang in his ears, while he went up-stairs. When the door opened she rose from the instrument and turned to greet him with a pale face, showing traces of recent tears.

All his self-command vanished at these tokens of her distress.

"You've been crying, my darling," said he, and taking her hand in both his own, he pressed it fondly to his lips.

It was not a bad beginning. Hitherto he had always been so formal, so respectful, so unlike a lover; now, when he saw that she was unhappy, the man's real nature broke out, and she liked him none the worse.

Withdrawing her hand, but looking very kindly, and speaking in a softer tone than usual, she bade him take no notice of her agitation.

"I'm nervous," said she. "I often am. You men can't understand these things, but it's better than being cross, at any rate."

"Cross!" he repeated. "Be as cross and as nervous as you like, only make *me* the prop when you require support, and the scapegoat when you want to scold."

"You're too good," said she, her dark eyes filling again, whereat he placed himself very close and took her hand once more. "Far too good for *me!* I've told you so a hundred times. General, shall I confess why I was—was making such a fool of myself, and what I was thinking of when you came in?"

"If it's painful to *you*, I'd rather not hear it," was his answer. "I want to be associated with the sunshine of your life, Blanche, not its shade."

She shook her head.

"Whoever takes part in *my* life," she replied, "must remain a good deal in the dark. That's what I was coming to. General, it is time you and I should understand each other. I feel I could tell *you* things I would not breathe to any other living being. You're so safe, so honourable, so punctiliously, so *ridiculously* honourable,—and I *like* you for it."

He looked grateful.

"I want you to like me," said he, "better and better every day. I'll try to deserve it."

"They say time works wonders," she answered wistfully, "and I feel I shall:—I *know* I shall. But there are some things I *must* tell you now, while I have the courage. Mind, I am prepared to take all consequences. I have deceived you, General. Deceived you in a way you could never imagine nor forgive."

"So people seem to think," he observed coolly, producing, at the same time, the anonymous letter from his pocket. "I should not have troubled you with such trash, but as you have chosen to make me your father-confessor

—perhaps I ought to say your *grand*-father-confessor—this morning, you may as well look through it, before we put that precious production in the fire."

He walked to the window, so as not to see her face while she read it, nor was this little act of delicacy and forbearance lost on such a woman as Blanche Douglas.

Her temper, nevertheless, became thoroughly roused before she got to the end of the letter, causing her to place herself once more in the position of an adversary. Her eyes shone, her brows lowered, and her words came in the tight, concentrated accents of bitter anger, while she bade him turn round, and look her in the face.

"This has only anticipated me," said she, pale and quivering. "I stand here arraigned like any prisoner in the dock, but with no excuses to offer, no defence to make. It is a fine position, truly; but having been fool enough to accept it, I do not mean to shrink from its disgrace. Ask me what questions you will, I am not afraid to answer them."

"Honestly?" said he, "without quibbles or afterthought, and once for all?"

She looked very stern and haughty.

"I am not in the habit of shuffling," she replied. "I never yet feared results from word or action of mine; and what I say, you may depend upon it I mean."

On the General's face came an expression of confidence and resolution she had never noticed before. Meeting his regard firmly, it occurred to her that so he must have looked when he rode through that Sepoy column, and charged those Russian guns. He was a gallant fellow, no doubt, bold and kind-hearted too.

If he had only been twenty years younger, or even ten!

He spoke rather lower than usual; but every syllable rang clear and true, while his eyes looked frankly and fearlessly into her own.

"Then answer my question once for all. Blanche, will you be my wife? Without further hesitation or delay?"

"Let me explain first."

"I ask for no explanation, and will listen to none. Suppose me to repose implicit confidence in the vague accusations of an anonymous slander;—suppose me to believe you false and fickle, a shameless coquette, and myself an infatuated old fool; — suppose anything and everything you please; but first answer the question I ask you from the bottom of my heart, with this anonymous statement—false or true, I care not a jot which—in my hand."

He held it as if about to tear it across and fling it in the grate. She laid a gentle touch on his arm and whispered softly—

"Don't destroy it till I've answered your question.—Yes! There is nobody like you in the world!"

We need not stop to repeat a proverb touching the irreverent persistency of Folly in travelling hand-in-hand with Age. Of what extravagances the General might have been guilty, in his exceeding joy, it is impossible to guess, had she not stopped him at the outset.

"Sit down there," she said, pointing to a corner of the sofa, while establishing herself in an arm-chair on the other side of the fire-place. "Now that you have had your say, perhaps you will let me have *mine!* Hush! I know what you mean. I take all that for granted. Stay where you are, hold your tongue, and listen to me."

"The first duty of a soldier is obedience," he answered in great glee. "I'll be as steady as I can."

"It is my *right* now to explain," she continued gravely. "Believe me. I most fully appreciate, I never can forget—whatever happened I never *could* forget—the confidence you have shown in me to-day. Depend upon it, when you trust people so unreservedly, you make it *impossible* for them to deceive. I have always honoured and admired you. During the last hour I have learned to—to—well—to think you deserve more than honour and esteem. Any woman might be proud and happy — yes — happy to belong to you. But now, if I am to be your wife—don't interrupt. Well, *as* I am to be your wife, you must let me tell you everything —everything—or I recall my promise."

"Don't do that," he answered playfully. "But mind, I'm quite satisfied with you as you are, and ask to know *nothing*."

She hesitated, and the colour came to her brow while she completed her confession.

"You—you lent me some money, you know; *gave* it me, I ought to say, for I'm quite sure you never expected to see it back again. It was a good deal. Don't contradict. It *was* a good deal, and I wonder how I could have the face to ask for it. But I didn't want it for myself. It was to save from utter ruin a very old and dear friend."

"I know all about it," said he cheerfully. "At least, I can guess. Very glad it should be so well employed. But all that was *your* business, not mine."

"And you never even asked who got it!" she continued, while again there gathered a mist to veil her large dark eyes.

"My dear Blanche," he answered, "I was only too happy to be of service to you. Surely it was your own, to employ as you liked. I don't want to know any more about it, even now."

"But you *must* know," she urged. "I've been going to tell you ever so often, but something always interrupted us; and once, when I had almost got it out, the words seemed to die away on my lips. Listen. You know I'm not very young."

He bowed in silence. The reflection naturally presented itself that if *she* were not very young, *he* must be very old.

Miss Douglas proceeded, with her eyes fixed on her listener, as if she was looking at something a long way off.

"Of course I've seen and known lots of

people in my life, and had some great friends—I mean *real* friends—that I would have made any sacrifice to serve. Amongst these was Mr. Walters. I used to call him Daisy. General, I—I liked him better than all the rest. Better than anybody in the world——"

"And now?" asked the General anxiously, but carrying a bold front notwithstanding.

"*Now*, I know I was mistaken," she replied. "Though that's not the question. Well, after that horrid race—when my beautiful mare ought to have won, and *didn't*—I knew Daisy—Mr. Walters, I mean—had lost more than he could afford to pay—in plain English, he was ruined; and worse, wouldn't be able to show, unless somebody came to the rescue. I hadn't got the money myself. Not a hundredth part of it! So I asked *you*, and—and—sent it all to *him*. Now you know the whole business."

"I knew it long ago," said he gently. "At least, I might have known it, had I ever allowed the subject to enter my head. Does *he* know it too, do you think, Blanche?"

"Good heavens! No!" she exclaimed. "That *would* be a complication. You don't think there's a chance of it! I took every care—every precaution. What *should* I do? General, what would you advise?"

He smiled to mark how she was beginning to depend on him, drawing a good augury from this alteration in her character, and would no doubt have replied in exceedingly affectionate terms, but that he was interrupted by the opening of the drawing-room door, and entrance of a servant, who, in a matter-of-fact voice, announced a visitor—

"Mr. Walters!"

Blanche turned white to her lips, and muttered rapidly, "Won't you stay, General? *Do!*"

But the General had already possessed himself of his hat, and, with an air of good-humoured confidence, that she felt did honour both to herself and him, took a courteous leave of his hostess, and gave a hearty greeting to the new-comer as they passed each other on the threshold.

"I think I've won the battle," muttered the old soldier, mounting his horse briskly in the street; "though I've left the enemy in possession of the ground!"

CHAPTER XXV.

A SATISFACTORY ANSWER.

DAISY, with his hair cut exceedingly short, as denoting that he was on the eve of some great crisis in life, entered the apartment in the sheepish manner of a visitor who is not quite sure about his reception. Though usually of cheerful and confident bearing, denoting no want of a certain self-assertion, which the present generation call "cheek," all his audacity seemed to have deserted him, and he planted himself in the centre of the carpet, with his hat in his hand, like the poor, spiritless bridegroom at Netherby, who stood "dangling his bonnet and plume" while his affianced and her bridesmaids were making eyes at young Lochinvar.

Miss Douglas, too, required a breathing-space to restore her self-command. When they had shaken hands, it was at least a minute before either could find anything to say.

The absurdity of the situation struck them both, but the lady was the first to recover her presence of mind; and, with a laugh not the least genuine, welcomed him back to England, demanding the latest news from Paddy-land.

"You've been at Cormac's-town, of course," said she. "You can tell us all about dear Lady Mary, and your pretty friend Norah. I hope she asked to be remembered to *me*."

He blushed up to his eyes, turning his hat in his hands, as if he would fain creep into it bodily, and hide himself from notice in the crown.

She saw her advantage, and gained courage every minute, so as to stifle and keep down the gnawing pain that made her so sick at heart.

"I wonder Norah trusts you in London," she continued, with another of those forced smiles. "I suppose you're only on short leave, as you call it, and mean to go back directly. Will you have the black mare to ride, while you are in town? I've taken great care of her, and she's looking beautiful!"

To her own ear, if not to his, there was a catch in her breath while she spoke the last words, that warned her she would need all her self-command before the play was played out.

He thanked her kindly enough, while he declined the offer; but his tone was so grave, so sorrowful, that she could keep up the affectation of levity no longer.

"What is it?" she asked, in an altered voice. "Daisy!—Mr. Walters! What is the matter? Are you offended? I was only joking about Norah."

"Offended!" he repeated. "How could I

ever be offended with *you ?* But I didn't come here to talk about Miss Macormac, nor even Satanella, except in so far as the mare is connected with your generosity and kindness."

"What do you mean ?" she asked, in considerable trepidation. "*You* were the generous one, for you gave me the best hunter in your stable, without being asked."

"As if you had not bought her over and over again!" he exclaimed, finding voice and words and courage now that he was approaching the important topic. "Miss Douglas, it's no use denying your good deeds, nor pretending to ignore their magnificence. It was only yesterday I learned the real name of my *unknown friend!* I tell you, that money of yours saved me from utter ruin—worse than ruin, from such disgrace as if I had committed a felony, and been sent to prison!"

"I'm sure you look as if you had just come out of one," she interposed, "with that cropped head. Why do you let them cut your hair so short ? It makes you hideous!"

"Never mind my cropped head," he continued, somewhat baffled by the interruption. "I hurried here at once, to thank you with all my heart, as the best friend I ever had in the world."

"Well, you've done it," said she. "That's quite enough. Now let us talk of something else."

"But I *haven't* done it," protested Daisy, gathering, from the obstacles in his way, a certain inclination to his task, or at least a determination to go through with it. "I haven't said half what I've got to say, nor a quarter of what I feel. You have shown that you consider me a near and dear friend. You have given me the plainest possible proof of your confidence and esteem. All this instigates me—or rather induces me, or, shall I say, encourages me—to hope, or perhaps persuade myself of some probability. In short, Miss Douglas—can't you help a fellow out with what he's got to say?"

Floundering about in search of the right expressions, she would have liked him to go on for an hour. It was delightful to be even on the brink of that paradise from which she must presently exclude herself for ever with her own hands, and she forbore to interrupt him till he came to a dead stop for want of words.

"Nonsense!" she said. "Any friend would have done as much who had the power. It's nothing to make a fuss about. I'm glad you're out of the scrape, and there's an end of it."

"You were always generous," he exclaimed. "You ought to have been a man; I've said so a hundred times—only it's lucky you're *not*, or I couldn't ask you a question that I don't know how to put in the right form."

She turned pale as death. It was come, then, at last—that moment to which she had once looked forward as a glimpse of happiness too exquisite for mortal senses. Here was the enchanted cup pressed to her very lip, and she must not taste it—must withdraw her very eyes from the insidious drink. And yet even now she felt a certain sense of disappointment in her triumph, a vague misgiving that the proffered draught was flatter than it should be, as if the bottle had been already opened to slake another's thirst.

"Better not ask," she said, "if the words don't come naturally,—if the answer is sure to be *no*."

In his intense relief he never marked the piteous tone of her voice, nor the tremble of agony passing over her face, like the flicker of a fire on a marble bust, to leave its features more fixed and rigid than before.

Even in her keen suffering she wished to spare *him*. Already she was beginning to long for the dull insensibility that must succeed this hour of mental conflict, as bodily numbness is the merciful result of pain. She dreaded the possibility that his disappointment should be anything like her own, and would fain have modified the blow she had no choice but to inflict.

Daisy, however, with good reasons, no doubt, was resolved to rush on his fate the more obstinately, as it seemed, because of the endeavours to spare both him and herself.

"I am a plain-spoken fellow," said he, "and —and—tolerably straightforward, as times go. I'm not much used to this kind of thing—at least, I've never regularly asked such a question before. You mustn't be offended, Miss Douglas, if I don't go the right way to work. But—but—it seems so odd that you should have come in and paid my debts for me! Don't you think I ought—or don't you think *you* ought—in short, I've come here on purpose to ask you to marry me. I'm not half good enough, I know, and lots of fellows would make you better husbands, I'm afraid. But, really now—without joking—won't you try?"

He had got into the spirit of the thing, and went on more swimmingly than he could have hoped. There was almost a ring of truth in his appeal, for Daisy's was a temperament that flung itself keenly into the excitement of the moment, gathering ardour from the very sense of pursuit. As he said of himself, "He never could help riding, if he got a start!"

And Miss Douglas shook in every limb while she listened with a wan, weary face and white lips, parted in a rigid smile. It was not that she was unaccustomed to solicitations of a like nature; whatever might be her previous experience, scarcely an hour had passed since she sustained a similar attack—and surely to accept an offer of marriage ought to be more subversive of the nervous system than to refuse; yet she could hardly have betrayed deeper emotion had she been trembling in the balance between life and death.

That was a brave heart of hers, or it must have failed to keep its own rebellion down so firmly, and gather strength to answer in a calm, collected voice—

"There are some things it is better not to think about, for they can never be, and this is one of them."

How little she knew what was passing in his mind! How little she suspected that *her* sentence was *his* reprieve! And yet his self-love was galled. He had made a narrow escape, and was thankful, no doubt, but felt somewhat disappointed, too, that his danger had not been greater still.

"Do you mean it?" said he. "Well, you'll forgive my presumption, and—and—you won't forget I asked you."

"*Forget!* ——"

It was all she said; but a man must have been both blind and deaf not to have marked the tone in which those syllables were uttered, the look that accompanied them. Daisy brandished his hat, thinking it high time to go, lest his sentence should be commuted, and his doom revoked.

She put her hand to her throat, as if she must choke; but mastered her feelings with an effort, forcing herself to speak calmly and distinctly now, on a subject that must never be approached again.

"Do not think I undervalue your offer," she said, gathering fortitude with every word; "do not think me hard, or changeable, or unfeeling. If you must not make me happy, at least you have made me very proud; and if everything had turned out differently, I do hope I might have proved worthy to be your wife. You're not angry with me, are you? And you won't hate me because it's impossible?"

"Not the least!" exclaimed Daisy eagerly. "Don't think it for a moment! Please not to make yourself unhappy about *me*."

"I *am* worthy to be your friend," she continued, saddened, and it may be a little vexed by this remarkable exhibition of self-denial; "and *as* a friend I feel I owe you some explanation, beyond a bare 'No, I won't.' It ought rather to be 'No, I *can't;*' because—because, to tell you the honest truth, I have promised somebody else!"

"I wish you joy, with all my heart!" he exclaimed gaily, and not the least like an unsuccessful suitor. "I hope you'll be as happy as the day is long! When is it to be? You'll send me an invitation to the wedding, won't you?"

Her heart was very sore. He did not even ask the name of his fortunate rival, and he could hardly have looked more pleased, she thought, if he had been going to marry her himself.

"I don't know about that," she answered, shaking her head sadly. "At any rate, I shall not see you again for a long time. Good-bye, Daisy," and she held out a cold hand that trembled very much.

"Good-bye," said he, pressing it cordially. "I shall never forget your kindness. Good-bye."

Then the door shut, and he was gone.

Blanche Douglas sank into a sofa, and sat there looking at the opposite wall, without moving hand or foot, till the long summer's day waned into darkness and her servant came with lights. She neither wept, nor moaned, nor muttered broken sentences, but remained perfectly motionless, like a statue, and in all those hours she asked herself but one question—"Do I love this man? and, if so, how can I ever bear to marry the other?"

CHAPTER XXVI.

AFTERNOON TEA.

"I WISH you'd come, Daisy. You've no idea what it is, facing all those swells by oneself!"

"I have *not* the cheek," was Daisy's reply. "They would chaff one so awfully, if they knew. No, Bill, I'll see you through anything but that."

"Then I must show the best front I can without a support," said the other ruefully. "Why can't she let me off these tea-fights? They're cruelly slow. I don't see the good of them."

"*She* does," replied Daisy. "Not a woman in London knows what she is about better than Mrs. Lushington."

"How d'ye mean?" asked his less worldly-minded friend.

"Why, you see," explained Daisy, "one great advantage of living in this wicked town is, that you've no duty towards your neighbour. People don't care two straws what you do, or how you do it, so long as you keep your own line without crossing theirs. They'll give you the best of everything, and ask for no return, if only you'll pretend to be glad to see them when you meet, and not forget them when you go away. That's the secret of morning-visits, card-leaving, wedding-presents, and the whole of the sham. Now Mrs. Lushington goes everywhere, and never has a ball, nor a drum, nor even a large dinner-party of her own, but she says to her friends, 'I love you dearly, I can't exist without you. Come and see me every Wednesday, except the Derby day, all the London season through, from five to seven p.m. I'll swear to be at home, and I'll give you a cup of tea!' So, for nine-pen'orth of milk, and some hot water, she repays the hospitalities of a nation. She's pleased, the world is gratified, and nobody's bored but *you*. It's all humbug, that's the truth, and I'm very glad I'm so soon to be out of it!"

"But you won't leave the regiment?" said his brother officer kindly.

"Not if I know it!" was the hearty response. "Norah likes soldiering, and old Macormac doesn't care what we do, if we only visit *him* in the hunting season. Besides, my uncle put that in the conditions when he 'parted,' which he did freely enough, I am bound to admit, considering all things."

"You've not been long about it," observed Soldier Bill in a tone of admiration. "It's little more than a month since you pulled through after that 'facer' at Punchestown; and now, here you are, booked to one lady, after proposing to another, provided with settlements, *trousseau*, bridesmaids, and very likely a bishop to marry you. Hang it, Daisy, I've got an uncle *smothered* in lawn; I'll give him the straight tip, and ask him to tie you up fast."

"You'll have to leave the Park at once," was Daisy's reply, "or you'll be returned absent when the parade is formed. You know, Bill, you *daren't* be late, for your life."

The two young men were by this time at Albert Gate, having spent a pleasant half-hour together on a couple of penny chairs, while the strange medley passed before them that throngs Hyde Park on every summer's afternoon. Daisy was far happier than he either hoped or deserved. After Satanella's refusal, he had felt at liberty to follow the dictates of his own heart, and lost no time in prosecuting his suit with Norah Macormac. The objections that might have arisen from want of means were anticipated by his uncle's unlooked-for liberality, and he was to be married as soon as the necessary arrangements could be made, though, in consideration of his late doings, the engagement was at present to be kept a profound secret.

Notwithstanding some worldly wisdom, Daisy could believe that such secrets divided amongst half-a-dozen people would not become the property of half-a-hundred.

In a mood like his, a man requires no companion but his own thoughts. We will rather accompany Soldier Bill, as he picks his way into Belgravia, stepping daintily over the muddy crossings, cursing the water-carts, and trying to preserve the polish of his boots, up to Mrs. Lushington's door.

Yet into those shining boots his heart seemed almost sinking, when he marked a long line of carriages in the streets, a crowd of footmen on the steps and pavement. No man alive had better nerve than Bill, to ride, or fight, or swim, or face any physical danger; but his hands turned cold, and his face hot, when about to confront strange ladies, either singly or in masses; and for him, the rustling of muslin was as the shaking of a standard to the inexperienced charger, a signal of unknown danger, a flutter of terror and dismay.

Nevertheless, he mastered his weakness, following his own name resolutely up-stairs, in a white heat, no doubt, yet supported by the calmness of despair. Fortunately, he found his hostess at her drawing-room door. The favourable greeting she accorded him would have re-assured the most diffident of men.

"You're a good boy," she whispered, with a squeeze of his hand. "I was almost afraid you wouldn't come. Stay near the door, while I do the civil to the arch-duchess. I'll be back directly. I've got something very particular to ask you."

So, while Mrs. Lushington did homage (in French) to the arch-duchess, who was old, fat, good-humoured, and very sleepy, Bill took up a position from which he could pass the inmates of the apartment in review. Observing his welcome by their hostess, and knowing *who he was*, two or three magnificent ladies thought it not derogatory to afford him a gracious bow; and as they forbore to engage him in discourse,—a visitation of which Bill had fearful misgivings,—he soon felt sufficiently at ease to inspect unconcernedly, and in detail, the several individuals who constituted the crush.

It was a regular London gathering, in the full tide of the season, consisting of the best-dressed, best-looking, and idlest people in town. There seemed an excess of ladies, as usual; but who would complain of a summer market, that it was over-stocked with flowers? While of the uglier sex, the specimens were either very young or very mature. There was scarcely a man to be seen between thirty and forty, but a glut of young gentlemen, some too much and some too little at their ease, with a liberal sprinkling of ancient dandies, irreproachable in manners, and worthier members of society, we may be permitted to hope, than society believed. A few notabilities were thrown in, of course: the arch-duchess aforesaid; a missionary, who had been tortured by the Chinese, dark, sallow, and of a physiognomy that went far to extenuate the cruelty of the Celestials; a lady who had spent two years at Thebes, and, perhaps for that reason, dressed almost as low as the Egyptian Sphinx; a statesman out of office; a celebrated preacher at issue with his bishop; a foreign minister; a London banker; and a man everybody knew, who wrote books nobody read. Besides these, there was the usual complement of ladies who gave, and ladies who went to, balls; married women addicted to flirting; single ladies not averse to it; stout mammas in gorgeous apparel; tall girls with baby-faces promising future beauty; a powdered footman winding, like an eel, through the throng; Frank Lushington himself, looking at his watch to see how soon it would be over; and pretty Bessie Gordon, fresh and smiling, superintending the tea.

All this Bill took in, wondering. It seemed such a strange way of spending a bright summer's afternoon, in weather that had come on purpose for cricket, boating, yachting, all sorts of out-of-door pursuits. Putting himself beside the question, for he felt as much on duty as if he had the belt on in a barrack-yard, it puzzled him to discover the spell that brought all these people together, in a hot room, at six o'clock in the day. Was it sheer idleness, or the love of talking, or only the follow-my-leader instinct of pigs and sheep? Catching sight of General St. Josephs and Miss Douglas conversing apart in a corner, he determined that it must be a motive stronger than any of these; and looking down on her broad deep shoulders, marvelled how such motive might affect his next neighbour, a lady of sixty years, weighing some sixteen stone.

It is fair to suppose, therefore, that Bill was as yet himself untouched. His intimacy with Mrs. Lushington, while sharpening his wits and polishing his manners, served, no doubt, to dispel those illusions of romance that all young men are prone to cherish, more or less; and Soldier Bill, with his fresh cheeks and simple heart, believed he was becoming a thorough philosopher, an experienced man of the world, rating human weaknesses at their real value, and walking about the battle of life sheathed in armour of proof. Honest Bill! How little he dreamt that his immunity was only a question of time! The hour had not yet come—nor the woman!

Far different was St. Josephs. If ever man exulted in bondage and seemed proud to rattle his chains, that man was the captive General. He never missed an opportunity of attending his conqueror: riding in the Park—"walking in the Zoo"—waiting about at balls, drums, crush-rooms, and play-houses,—he never left her side.

Miss Douglas, loathing her own ingratitude, was weary of her life. Even Bill could not help remarking the pale cheeks, the heavy eyes, the dull lassitude of gait and bearing, that denoted the feverish unrest of one who is sick at heart.

He trod on a chaperone's skirt, and omitted to beg pardon; he stumbled against his uncle, the bishop, and forgot to ask after his aunt. So taken up was he with the faded looks of Miss Douglas, that he neither remembered where he was, nor why he came, and only recovered consciousness with the rustle of Mrs. Lushington's dress and her pleasant voice in his ear.

"Give me your arm," said she, pushing on through her guests, with many winning smiles, "and take me into the little room for some tea."

Though a short distance, it was a long passage. She had something pleasant to say to everybody, as she threaded the crowd; but it could be no difficult task for so experienced a campaigner, on her own ground, to take up any position she required. And Bill found himself established at last by her side, in a corner, where they were neither overlooked nor overheard.

"Now I want to know if it's true?" said she, dashing into the subject at once. "*You* can tell, if anybody can, and I'm sure you have no secrets from *me*."

"If *what's* true?" asked Bill, gulping tea that made him hotter than ever.

"Don't be stupid!" was her reply. "Why, about Daisy of course. Is he going to marry that Irish girl? I want to find out at once."

"Well, it's no use denying it," stammered Bill, somewhat unwillingly. "But it's a dead secret, Mrs. Lushington, and of course it goes no farther."

"Oh, of course!" she repeated. "Don't you know how safe I am? But you're quite sure of it? You have it from himself?"

"I've got to be his best man," returned Bill, by no means triumphantly. "You'll coach me up a little, won't you, before the day? I haven't an idea what to do."

She laughed merrily.

"Make love to the bridesmaids, of course," she answered. "Irish, no doubt, every one of them. I'm not quite sure I shall give you leave."

"I can't get out of it!" exclaimed Bill. "He's such a 'pal,' you know, and a brother-officer, and all."

She was amused at his simplicity.

"I don't want you to get out of it," she answered still laughing. "I can't tell what sort of a best man you'll make, but you're not half a bad boy. You deserve something for coming to-day. Dine with us to-morrow—nobody but the Gordon girls and a stray man. I must go and see the great lady off. That's the worst of royalty. Good-bye;" and she sailed away, leaving Bill somewhat disconcerted by misgivings that he had been guilty of a breach of trust.

The party was thinning visibly up-stairs, while people transferred themselves with one accord to the hall and staircase, many appearing to consider this the pleasantest part of the entertainment. Mrs. Lushington had scarcely yet found time to speak three words to Blanche Douglas, but she caught her dear friend now, on the eve of departure, and held her fast. The General had gone to look for his ladye-love's carriage. They were alone in Mr. Lushington's snuggery, converted (though not innocent of tobacco smoke) into a cloak-room for the occasion.

"So good of you to come, dear Blanche, and to bring *him*" (with a meaning smile). "I waited to pounce on you *here*. I've got *such* a piece of news for you!"

Miss Douglas looked as if nothing above, upon, or under the earth could afford her the slightest interest, but she was obliged to profess a polite curiosity.

"Who *do* you think is going to be married?—immediately! next week, I believe. Who but our friend Daisy!"

The shot told. Though Miss Douglas received it with the self-command of a practised duellist, so keen an observer as her friend did not fail to mark a quiver of the eyelids, a tightening of the lips, and a grey hue creeping gradually over the face.

"Our fickle friend Daisy, of all people in the world!" continued Mrs. Lushington. "It only shows how we poor women can be deceived. I sometimes fancied he admired *me*, and I never doubted but he cared for *you*, whereas he has gone and fallen a victim to that wild Irish girl of Lady Mary Macormac's—the pretty one—that was such a friend of yours."

"I always thought he admired her," answered Miss Douglas in a very feeble voice. "I ought to write and wish Norah joy. Are you quite sure it's true?"

"Quite!" was the reply. "My authority is his own best man."

Fortunately the General appeared at this juncture, with tidings of the carriage, while, through a vista of footmen, might be seen at the open door a brougham-horse on his hind-legs, impatient of delay.

"Good-bye, dear Blanche! You look so tired. I hope you haven't done too much."

"Good-bye, dear Clara! I've had such a pleasant afternoon."

Putting her into the carriage, the General's kind heart melted within him. She looked so pale and worn. She clung so confidingly, so dejectedly to his arm. She pressed his hand so affectionately when he bade her good-bye, and seemed so loth to let it go, that but for the eyes of all England, which every man believes are fixed on himself alone, he would have sprung in, too, and driven off with her then and there.

But he consoled himself with the certainty of seeing her next day. That comfort accompanied him to his bachelor lodgings, where he dressed, and lasted all through a regimental dinner at the London Tavern.

While a distinguished leader proposed his health, alluding in flattering terms to the services he had rendered and the dangers he had faced, General St. Josephs was thinking far less of his short soldier-like reply than of the pale face and the dark eyes that would so surely greet him on the morrow, of the future about to open before him at last, that would make amends for a life of war and turmoil, with its gentle solace of love and confidence and repose.

CHAPTER XXVII.

A HARD MORSEL.

LIKE the feasts of Apicius, that dinner at the London Tavern was protracted to an unconscionable length. Its dishes were rich, various, and indigestible, nothing being served *au naturel* and without "garnish" but the brave simplicity of the guests.

> "Wines too there were that would have slain young Ammon;'

and old comrades seldom part under such conditions, without the consumption of much tobacco in the small hours. Nevertheless, St. Josephs rose next morning fresh and hopeful as a boy. He ordered his horse for an early canter in the Park, and shared the Row with divers young ladies of tender years, but dauntless courage, who crammed their ponies along at a pace that caused manes and tails and golden hair to float horizontal on the breeze, defiant even of that mounted inspector, whose heart, though professionally intolerant of "furious riding," softened to a pigmy with snub nose and rosy cheeks, on a tiny quadruped, as round, as fat, and as saucy-looking as itself.

St. Josephs felt in charity with all mankind, and returned to breakfast so light of heart, that he ought to have known, under the invariable law of compensation, some great misfortune was in store.

He had little appetite; happiness, like sorrow, when excessive, never wants to eat; but he dressed himself again with the utmost care, and after exhausting every expedient to while away the dragging hours, started at half-past eleven for the abode of his ladye-love.

Do what he would, it was scarcely twelve when he arrived at her door, where his summons remained so long unanswered, that he had leisure to speculate on the possibility of Miss Douglas being indisposed and not yet awake. So he rang next time, stealthily, and, as it were, under protest, but in vain.

The General then applied himself to the area-bell. "They'll come directly now," he argued; "they'll think it's the beer!" And sure enough the street-door was quickly unfastened, with more turning of keys, clanking of chains, and withdrawal of bolts than is usual during the middle of the season, in the middle of the day.

A very grimy old woman met him on the threshold, and peering suspiciously out of her keen, deep-set eyes, demanded his business in a hoarse voice, suggestive of gin.

"Miss Douglas b'aint here," was the startling answer to his inquiries. "She be gone away for good. Hoff this morning, I shouldn't wonder, afore you was out of bed."

"Gone!" he gasped. "This morning! Did she leave no message?"

"None that I knows of. The servants didn't say nothink about it; leastways, not to *me*."

"But she's coming back?"

"Not likely! The maid *did* suppose as they was a-going for good and all. It's no business of mine. I'm not Miss Douglas's servant. I'm a taking care of the 'ouse for the landlord, I am. It's time I was a-tidying of it up now."

With this broad hint, she proceeded to shut the door in his face, when the General, recovering his presence of mind, made use of the only argument his experience had taught him was universal and conclusive.

Her frown relaxed with the touch of money on her palm. "You're a gentleman, you are," she observed approvingly. "Won't ye step in, sir? It's bad talking with the door in your 'and."

He complied, and sat down on one of the bare hall-chairs, feeling as he had felt once before, when badly hit, in the Punjaub.

She went on with her dusting, talking all the time. "You see they sent round for me first thing in the morning; and I says to Mrs. Jones—that's my landlady, sir,"—(dropping a curtsey),—"'Mrs. Jones,' says I, 'whatever they can be up to,' says I, 'making such an early flitting?' says I——"

"But do you mean they've left no letter?" he interrupted, starting from his seat; "no directions—no address? Are all the servants gone? Has Miss Douglas taken much luggage with her? Did she go away in a cab? Oh, woman! woman! tell me all you know! It's a matter of life and death!"

She looked at him askance, privately opining that, early as it was, the gentleman had been drinking, and sympathising with him none the less for that impression.

"They're off," said she stubbornly; "and they've took everythink along with them—bags and boxes, and what not. There was a man round after the keys—not half an hour gone. I should say as they wasn't coming back, none of 'em, no more."

This redundancy of negatives forcibly expressed her hopelessness of their return, and the General's good sense told him it was time wasted to cross-question his informant any further. Summoning his energies, he reflected that the post-office would be the best place whereat to prosecute inquiries, so he bade the old woman farewell, with all the fortitude he could muster, leaving her much impressed by his manners, bearing, and profuse liberality.

At the post-office, however (an Italian warehouse round the corner), they knew nothing. The General, at his wits' end, bethought him of those livery-stables where Satanella kept her namesake, the redoubtable black mare.

Here his plight excited the utmost interest and commiseration. "Certainly. The General should have all the assistance in their power. Of course, the lady had forgotten to leave her address, no doubt. Ladies *was* careless, sometimes, in such matters. A *beautiful* 'orsewoman," the livery-stable keeper understood, "an' kep' two remarkably clever ones for her own riding. Had an idea they went away this very morning. Might be mistaken. John could tell. John was the head-ostler. It was John's business to know." So a bell rang, and John, in a long-sleeved waistcoat, sleeking a close-cropped head, appeared forthwith.

"Black mare and chesnut 'oss," said John decidedly. "Gone this morning; groom took with him saddles, clothing, and everything. Paid up to the end of their week. Looked like travelling—had their knee-caps on. Groom a close chap; wouldn't say where. Wish he (John) could find out. Left a setting-muzzle behind, and would like to send it after him."

There seemed nothing to be done here, and the General was fain to retrace his steps, hurt, anxious, angry, and more puzzled when he reached home than he had ever been in his life.

For an hour or two, the whole thing seemed so impossible, and the absurdity of the situation struck him as so ridiculous, that he sat idly in his chair to wait for tidings. In this nineteenth century, he told himself, people could not disappear from the surface of society, and leave no sign. Rather, like the sea-bird diving in the waves, if they go down in one place, they must come up in another. There were no kidnappings now, no sendings off to the Plantations, no forcible abductions of ladies, young or old. Then his heart turned sick, and his blood ran cold, while he recalled more than one instance in his own experience, where individuals had suddenly vanished from their homes and never been heard of again.

Stung to action by such thoughts, he collected his ideas to organise a comprehensive system of pursuit, that should embrace inquiries at all the railway-stations, cab-stands, and turnpikes in and about the metropolis, with the assistance of Scotland Yard in the background. Then he remembered how an old brother-officer had told him, only the other day, of a similar search made by himself, and attended with success. So he resolved to consult that comrade without delay. It was now two o'clock. He would find him eating luncheon at his Club. In five minutes the General was in a Hansom cab, and in less than ten, leaped out on the steps of that military resort.

Had he gone there an hour ago, it would have spared him a good deal of mental agitation, though perhaps any amount of anxiety would have been preferable to the dull, sickening resignation which succeeded a blow that could no longer be modified, parried, nor escaped. In after-times, the General looked back to those ten minutes in the Hansom cab as the close of an era in his life. Henceforth, every object in nature seemed to have lost something of its colouring, and the sun never shone so bright again.

In the hall an obsequious porter handed him a letter. He staggered when he recognised the familiar handwriting on the envelope, and drew his breath hard for the effort before he tore it open.

There were several pages, some of them crossed. He retired to the strangers' room, and sat down to pursue the death-warrant of his happiness.

"You will forgive me," it began, "because you are the kindest, the best, the most generous of men; but I should never forgive myself the blow I feel I am now inflicting, were it not that I regard your pride, your character, your high sense of honour, before your happiness. General, I am unfit to be your wife: not because my antecedents are somewhat obscure—*you* know my history, and that I have no reason to be ashamed of it; not because I undervalue the happiness of so high and enviable a lot--any woman, as I have told you more than once, would be proud of your choice; but because you deserve, and could so well appreciate, the unalloyed affection, the complete devotion, that are not mine to give. *Your* wife should have no thought but for you, no hopes independent of you, no memories in which you do not form a part. She should be wrapped up in your existence, identified with you, body and soul. All this I am *not*. I never have been—I never *can* be now. Had I entertained a lower opinion of your merits, admired and *cared for* you less, I would have kept my promise faithfully, and we might have jogged on like many another couple, comfortably enough. But *you* ought to win more than mere *comfort* in married life. You merit, and would expect, *happiness*. How could I bear to see my hero disappointed? For you are my hero—my beau-ideal of a gentleman—and my standard is a very high one, or you and I had never been so unhappy as I firmly believe we both are at this moment. It is in vain to regret, and murmur, and speculate on what might have been, if everything, including one's own identity, were different. There is but one line to take now, even at the eleventh hour. Some day you will acknowledge that I was right. We must never meet again. I have taken such precautions as can baffle, I do believe, even your energy and resource. You have often said nobody was so determined when I had made up my mind. I am resolved that you shall never find out what has become of me; and I entreat you—I adjure you—if you love me—nay, as you love me—not to try! So now, farewell—a long farewell, that it pains me sore to say. I shall never forget you. In all my conflict of feelings, in all my self-reproach and bitter sorrow, when I think of your pain, I cannot bring myself to wish we had never met. I am proud of your notice and your regard—proud to remain under obligations to you—proud to have loved you so far as my false, wicked nature had the power. Even now I can say, though you put me out of your heart, do not let me pass entirely from your memory. Think sometimes, and not unkindly, of your wilful, wayward—

"BLANCHE."

So it was all over.

"It's a good letter," murmured the General; "but I prefer the one Julia wrote to Juan." Then he read it through again, and found, as is usually the case, that the second perusal reversed his impression of the first. Did she *really* mean he was to abstain from all attempt to follow her? He examined the envelope; it bore the stamp of the General Post Office; the contents certainly afforded him no clue, yet, judging by analogy, he argued that no woman would lay such stress on the precautions she had taken if she did not wish their efficacy to be proved. When he found, however, that nothing short of police-detectives and newspaper advertisements would avail him, he took a juster view of her intentions, and in the chivalry of his nature resolved that under this great affliction, as in every other condition of their acquaintance, he would yield implicitly to her wish.

So he went back into the world, grave, kindly, and courteous as before. There were a few more grey hairs in his whiskers, and he avoided ladies' society altogether; otherwise, to the unobservant eye, he was little altered; but a dear old friend whom he had nursed through cholera at Varna, and dragged from under a dead horse at Lucknow, took him into a bay-window of the club-library, and thus addressed him :—

"My good fellow, you're looking shamefully seedy. Idleness never suited you. Nothing like work to keep old horses sound. Why don't you apply for employment? There's always something to do in the East."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

"SEEKING REST AND FINDING NONE."

BUT great nations do not plunge recklessly into war, nor even do mountain tribes rise suddenly in rebellion because an elderly gentleman is suffering like some sentimental school-girl from a disappointment of the heart. General St. Josephs extorted, indeed, from a great personage the promise that if anything turned up he would not be forgotten, and was fain to content himself, for the time, with a pledge in which he knew he could place implicit trust. So the weary, hot months dragged on, and he remained in London, solitary, silent, pre-occupied, wandering about the scenes of his former happiness, like a ghost. He went yachting, indeed, with one friend, and agreed on a pedestrian excursion through Switzerland with another; but the "sad sea waves" were too sad for him to endure, and the energy that should have taken him over a mountain, or up a glacier, seemed to fail with the purchase of a knapsack and the perusal of a foreign Bradshaw, so the walking tour was abandoned, and the friend rather congratulated himself on escaping such a mournful companion.

When autumn came round with its many temptations to Scotland, where the muir-fowl were crowing about their heathery knolls, and the red-deer sunning their fat backs on the leeward side of the corrie, he did indeed avail himself of certain invitations to the hospitable North; and the General, who could level rifle or fowling-piece, breast a hill, or plunge through a moss with his juniors by twenty years, strove hard in fatigue of body to earn repose for the mind. But he did not stay long; the grand, grave beauty of those silent hills oppressed and tortured him. He pitied the wild old cock, flapping its life out on its own purple heather, fifty yards off, mowed down by his deadly barrel, even as it rose. When he had stalked the "muckle red hart," with antlered front of royalty, and three inches of fat on those portly sides, up the burn, and under the waterfall, and through the huge grey boulders of eternal rock, to sight the noble beast fairly from a windward ambush, and bring it down, pierced through the heart with a long and "kittle" shot, his triumph was all merged in sorrow for the dead monarch lying so calm and stately in the quiet glen, not perhaps without a something of envy, for a creature thus insensible, and at rest for evermore.

The foresters wondered to see him in no way triumphant, and when they heard next morning he was gone, shook their heads, opining that "it was a peety! She was a pratty shot, and a fery tight shentlemans on a hill."

It was *work* the General required, not amusement; so he journeyed sadly back, to await in London the command he hoped would ere long recall him to a profession he had always loved, that seemed now to offer the sympathy and solace of a home.

Sometimes, but this only in moments of which he was ashamed, he would speculate on the possibility of meeting Miss Douglas by accident in the great city, and it soothed him to fancy the explanations that would ensue. He never dreamed of their resuming their old footing; for the General's forbearance hitherto had sprung from the strength, not the weakness of his character, and the same stubborn gallantry that held his position was available to cover his defeat; but it would be a keen pleasure, he thought, though a sad one, to look in her face just once more. After that he might turn contentedly Eastward, go back into harness, and never come to England again.

In the meantime, the days that dragged so wearily with St. Josephs, danced like waves in the sunshine through many of those other lives with which he had been associated in his late history. Amongst all gregarious animals, it is the custom for a sick or wounded beast to withdraw from the herd, who in no way concern themselves about its fate, but continue their browsings, baskings, croppings, waterings, and friskings, with a well-bred resignation to another's plight worthy of the human race. If the General's friends and acquaintance asked each other what had become of him, and waited for an answer, they were satisfied with the conventional surmise—

"Gone to Scotland, I fancy. They tell me it's a wonderful year for grouse!"

Mrs. Lushington, yachting at Cowes, and remaining a good deal at anchor, because it was "blowing fresh outside," thought of him perhaps more than anybody else. Not that she felt the least remorseful for the break-up she believed to have originated solely in her own manœuvres. She was persuaded that her information conveyed through the anonymous letter had aroused suspicions which, becoming certainties on inquiry, detached him from Satanella, and, completely mistaking his character, considered it impossible but that their dissolution of partnership originated with the gentleman. How the lady fared interested her but little, and in conversation with other dearest friends, she usually summed up the fate of this one by explaining—

"It was *impossible* to keep poor Blanche straight. Always excitable, and unlike other people, you know. Latterly, I am afraid, *more* than flighty, my dear, and *more* than odd."

Besides, Mrs. Lushington, as usual, had a great deal of business on hand. For herself and her set Cowes was nothing in the world but London gone down to the sea. Shorter petticoats, and hats instead of bonnets, made the whole difference. There were the same attractions, the same interests, the same intrigues. Even the same bores went to and fro, and bored, as they breathed, more freely in the soft, Channel air. Altogether, it was fresher and quieter, but, if possible, stupider than Pall Mall.

Nevertheless, Mrs. Lushington being in her natural element, exercised her natural functions. She was hard at work, trying to mate Bessie Gordon, nothing loth, with a crafty widower, who seemed as shy of the bait as an old gudgeon under Kew Bridge. She had undertaken, in conspiracy with other frisky matrons, to spoil poor Rosie Barton's game with young Wideacres, the catch of the season; and they liked each other so well that this job alone kept her in constant employment. She had picnics to organise, yachting-parties to arrange, and Frank to keep in good-humour; the latter no easy task, for Cowes bored him extremely, and, to use his own words, "he wished the whole place at the devil!" She felt also vexed and disappointed that the General had withdrawn himself so entirely from the sphere of her attractions, reflecting that she saw a great deal more of him before he was free. Added to her other troubles, was the unpardonable defection of Soldier Bill. That volatile Light Dragoon had never been near her since Daisy's marriage—a ceremony in which he took the most lively interest, comporting himself as "best man" with an unparalleled audacity, and a joyous flow of spirits, that possessed, for a gathering composed of lively Hibernians, the greatest attractions. People said, indeed, that Bill had shown himself not entirely unaffected by the charms of a lovely bridesmaid, the eldest of Lady Mary's daughters; and it was impossible to over-estimate the danger of his position under such suggestive circumstances as must arise from a wedding in the house.

Then a grey hair or two had lately shown themselves in her abundant brown locks; while of the people she chose to flirt with, some neglected her society for a cruise, others afforded her more of the excitement produced by rivalry than she relished. None paid her the devoted attention she had learned to consider her due. Altogether, Mrs. Lushington began to find life less *couleur de rose* than she could wish, and to suspect the career she had adopted was not conducive to happiness, or even comfort. Many people make the same discovery when it is too late to abandon the groove in which they have elected to run.

Daisy, in the meantime, true to his expressed intention of turning over a new leaf, found no reason to be dissatisfied with his lot. You might search Ireland through, and it is saying a good deal, without finding a more joyous couple than Captain and Mrs. Walters. The looked-for promotion arrived at last, and the bridegroom had the satisfaction of seeing himself gazetted to a troop on the very morning that provided him with a wife. Old Macormac was pleased, Lady Mary was pleased, everybody was pleased. The Castle blazed with light and revelry, the tenants drank, danced, and shouted. The "boys" burnt the mountain with a score of bonfires, consuming whiskey, and breaking each other's heads to their own unbounded satisfaction. In short, to use the words of Peter Corrigan, the oldest solvent tenant on the estate, "The masther's wedding was a fool to't! May I never see glory av' it wasn't betther divarsion than a wake!"

But Norah's gentle heart, even in her own new-found happiness, had a thought for the beautiful and stately Englishwoman, whom, if she somewhat feared her as a rival, she yet loved dearly as a friend.

"What's gone with her, Daisy?" she asked her young husband, before they had been married a fortnight. "Sure she would never take up with the nice old gentleman, a general he was, that marked the race-cards for us at Punchestown. Oh, Daisy! how I cried that night, because you didn't win!"

They were walking by the river-side, where they landed the big fish at an early period of their acquaintance, and Norah brought the gaff to bear in more ways than she suspected; where they parted so hopelessly, when, because of his very desolation, the true and generous girl had consented to plight him her troth; and where they had hardly dared to hope they would meet again in such a glow of happiness as shone round them to-day. It was bright spring weather when they wished each other that sorrowful good-bye. Now, the dead leaves were falling thick and fast in the grey autumn gloom. Nevertheless, this was the real vernal season of joy and promise for both those loving hearts.

"What a goose you were to back me!" observed Daisy, with a pressure of the arm that clung so tight round his own. "It served you right, and, I hope, cured you of betting once for all!"

"That's no answer to my question," persisted Mrs. Walters. "I'm asking you to tell me about my beautiful Blanche Douglas, and why wouldn't the old General marry her if she'd have him."

"That's it, dear," replied her husband; "she *wouldn't* have him! She--she accepted him, I *know*, and then she threw him over."

"What a shame!" exclaimed Norah. "Though, to be sure, he might have been her father." Then a shadow passed over her fair young brow, and she added wistfully, "Ah, Daisy! I'm thinking I know who she wanted all the time."

"Meaning *me?*" said Daisy, with a frank, saucy smile, that brought the mirth back to her face, and the sunshine to her heart.

"Meaning *you*, sir!" she repeated playfully. "But it's very conceited of you to think it, and very wrong to let it out. It's not so wonderful, after all," she added, looking proudly in his handsome young face: "I suppose I'm not the only girl that's liked you, dear, by a many. I oughtn't to expect it!"

"The only one that's *landed* the fish!" laughed Daisy, stopping in the most effectual manner a little sigh, with which she was about to conclude her peroration. "You're mistaken about Miss Douglas, though," he added, "I give you my word. She hadn't your good taste, my dear, and didn't *see* it! Look, Norah, there's the very place I left Sullivan's fishing-rod. He'll never get it again, so it's lucky I bought his little brown horse. I wonder who found it. What a day that was! Norah, do you remember?"

"*Remember!*"

So the conversation turned on that most interesting of topics—themselves, and did not revert to Satanella nor her doings. If Norah was satisfied, Daisy felt no wish to pursue the subject. However indiscreet concerning his successes, I think when a man has been refused by another lady, he says nothing about it to his wife.

CHAPTER XXIX.

UNDIVIDED.

THE late autumn was merging into early winter, that pleasantest of all seasons for those sportsmen who exult in the stride of a good horse, and the stirring music of the hound. Even in Pall Mall true lovers of the chase felt stealing over them the annual epidemic, which winter after winter rages with unabated virulence, incurable by any known remedy. A sufferer—it would be a misnomer to call him a *patient*—from this November malady was gaping at a print-shop window, near the bottom of St. James's Street, wholly engrossed in the performances of a very bright bay horse, with a high-coloured rider, flying an impossible fence, surrounded by happy hunting-grounds, where perspective seemed unknown.

"D'ye think he'll get over, Bill?" said a familiar voice, that could only belong to Daisy Walters, who had stolen unperceived behind his friend.

"Not if the fool on his back can pull him into it," answered the other indignantly. And these comrades, linking arms, turned eastward, in the direction of their Club.

"How's the Missis?" said Bill, whose boast it was that he never forgot his manners.

"Fit as a fiddle," replied the happy husband. "Had a long letter from Molly this morning. Sent her best love—no, scratched that out, and desired to be kindly remembered to *you*."

Molly, called after Lady Mary, was the eldest, and, in Bill's opinion, the handsomest daughter, so he changed the subject with rather a red face.

"About to-morrow, now," said Bill. "I've got Martingale to do my orderly. Are you game for a day with the stag?"

"Will a duck swim!" was the answer. "Norah is coming too. I shall mount her on Boneen. He's own brother to the little horse that beat us at Punchestown."

"Couldn't do better in that country," asserted his friend. "He'll carry her like a bird, if she'll wake him up a bit, and it's simply *impossible* to get him down. By Jove, Daisy, there's St. Josephs going into the Club. How seedy he looks, and how old! Hang me, if I won't offer him a mount to-morrow. I wonder if he'll come?"

So this kind-hearted young sportsman, in whose opinion a day's hunting was the panacea for all ills, mental or bodily, followed his senior into the morning-room, and proffered his best horse, with the winning frankness of manner that his friends found it impossible to resist.

"He's good enough to carry the Commander-in-Chief," said Bill. "I've more than I can ride till I get my long leave. I should be *so* proud if you'd have a day on him; and if he makes a mistake, I'll give him to you. There!"

St. Josephs was now on the eve of departure for the employment he had solicited. While his outfit was preparing, the time hung heavy on his hands, and he had done so many kindnesses by this young subaltern that he felt it would be only graceful and friendly to accept a favour in return, so he assented willingly, and Bill's face glowed with pleasure.

"Don't be late," said he. "Nine o'clock train from Euston. Mind you get into the drop-carriage, or they'll take you on to the Shires. I'll join you at Willesden. And if we don't have a real clinker, I'll make a vow never to go hunting again."

Then he departed on certain errands of his own connected with the pugilistic art, and the General reflected sadly how it was a quarter of a century since he used to feel as keen as that reckless, light-hearted boy.

He waited on high authorities at the War Office, dined with a field-marshal, and, through a restless night, dreamed of Satanella, for the first time since her disappearance.

A foggy November morning, and a lame horse in the cab that took him to Euston Station did not serve to raise his spirits. But for Bill's anticipations of "a clinker," and the disappointment he knew it would cause that enthusiast, the General might have turned back to spend one more day in vain brooding and regret. Arrived on the platform, however, he got into a large saloon-carriage, according to directions, and found himself at once in the midst of so cheerful a party that he felt it impossible to resist the fun and merriment of the hour.

St. Josephs was too well-known in general society not to find acquaintances even here, though he was hardly prepared to meet representatives of so many pursuits and professions, booted and spurred for the chase, and, judging by the ceaseless banter they interchanged,

> "All determined to ride, each resolved to be first."

Soldiers, sailors, diplomatists, bankers, lawyers, artists, authors, men of pleasure, and men of business, holding daily papers they never looked at, were all talking across each other, and laughing incessantly, while enthroned at one end of the carriage sat the best sportsman and most popular member of the assemblage, whose opinions, like his horses, carried great weight, and were of as unflinching a nature as his riding, so that he was esteemed a sort of president in jack-boots. Opposite him was placed pretty Irish Norah, now Mrs. Walters, intensely excited by her first appearance at what she called "an English hunt," while she imparted to Daisy, in a mellower brogue than usual, very original ideas on things in general, and especially on the country through which they were flying at the rate of forty miles an hour.

"It's like a garden where it's in tillage, and a croquet-lawn where it's in pasture," said Norah, after a gracious recognition of the General, and cordial greeting to Bill, who was bundled in at Willesden, panting, with his spurs in his hand. "Ah! now, Daisy, it's little of the whip poor Boneen will be wanting for easy leaps like them."

"Wait till you get into the Vale," said Daisy; "and whatever you do, let his head alone. Follow me close, and if I'm down, ride over me: it's the custom of the country."

The General smiled.

"I haven't been there for twenty years," said he; "but I can remember in my time we were not very particular. I shall follow my old friend," he added, nodding to the president, whose nether garments were of the strongest and most workmanlike materials; "when a man has no regular hunting things, he wants a leader to turn the thorns, and from all I hear, if I can only stick to mine, I shall be in a very good place."

Everybody agreed to this, scanning the speaker with approving glances the while. St. Josephs, though wearing trousers and a common morning coat, had something in his appearance that denoted the practised horseman, and when he talked of "twenty years ago," his listeners gave him credit for those successes which, in all times, are attributed to the men of the past.

"Mrs. Walters must be a little careful at the doubles," hazarded a quiet good-looking man who had not yet spoken, but whose nature it was to be exceedingly courteous where ladies were concerned. "A wise horse that knows its own rider is everything in the Vale."

Norah looked in the speaker's dark eyes with a quaint smile.

"Ah, then! if the horse wasn't wiser than the rider," said she, "it's not many leaps any of us would take without a fall!" and in the general laughter provoked by this incontestable assertion, a slight jerk announced that their carriage was detached from the train, and they had arrived.

Though it requires a long time to settle a lady in the saddle for hunting, even when in the regular swing of twice or thrice a week, and though Norah was about to enjoy her first gallop of the season, in a new habit, on a new horse, she and Daisy had ample leisure for a sober ride to the place of meeting, arriving cool and calm, pleased with the weather, the scenery, the company, and, above all, delighted with Boneen.

They were accompanied by the General on a first-class hunter belonging to Bill, and soon overtaken by its owner, who, having lingered behind to jump a four-year-old over a tempting stile for educational purposes, had crushed a new hat, besides daubing his coat, in the process.

"Down already!" said St. Josephs. "What happened to him? What did he do?"

"Rapped very hard," answered Bill; "found his friend at home, and went in without waiting to be announced;" but he patted the young pupil on its neck, and promised to teach it the trade before Christmas, nevertheless. Certainly, if practice makes perfect, no man should have possessed a stud of cleverer fencers than Soldier Bill.

And now, as she reached the summit of a grassy ascent, there broke on Norah's vision so extensive and beautiful a landscape as elicited an exclamation of amazement and delight.

Mile after mile, to the grey horizon, stretched a sweep of smooth wide pastures, intersected by massive hedges, not yet bare of their summer luxuriance, dotted by lofty standard trees, rich in the gaudy hues of autumn, lit up by flashes of a winding stream, that gleamed here and there under the willows with which its banks were fringed. Enclosures varying from fifty to a hundred acres gave promise of as much galloping as the heart of man, or even woman, could desire. And scanning those fences, the Irish lady admitted to herself, though not to her companions, that from a distance they looked as formidable obstacles as any she had confronted in Kildare.

"It's beautiful!" said Norah. "It's made on purpose for a hunt. Look, Daisy, there are the hounds! Oh, the darlings! And little Boneen, he sees them, too!"

Gathered round their huntsman, a wiry sporting-looking man on a thorough-bred bay horse, they were moving into sight from behind a haystack that stood in a corner of the neighbouring field. Rich in colour, beautiful in shape, and with a family likeness pervading the lot as if they were all one litter, a fox-hunter would have grudged them for the game they were about to pursue—a noble red-deer, in so far tame, that he was fed in a paddock, and brought to a condition that could tax the speed and endurance even of this famous pack. The animal had already arrived in a large van on wheels, drawn by a pair of horses, and surrounded by a levee of gaping rustics, whose eagerness and love for the sport reminded Norah of her countrymen on the other side of the Channel.

"Will they let him out here, Daisy?" said she, in accents of trembling excitement. "I wish they'd begin. What are we waiting for?"

"Your patience will not be tried much longer," said the General, lighting a cigar. "Here comes the Master, at a pace that looks as if the mare that landed him the Thousand Guineas, the Oaks, and the St. Leger, had been made a cover-hack for the occasion!"

"With the Derby-winner of the same year for second horse!" added her husband. "If you want a pilot, Norah, you couldn't do better than stick to *him*, heavy as he is!"

"I mean to follow *you*, sir," was the rejoinder. "If you don't mind, Daisy, may-be I'll be before ye."

Even while she spoke a stir throughout the whole cavalcade, and a smothered shout from the foot-people, announced that the deer had been enlarged.

With a wild leap in the air, as though rejoicing in recovered liberty, the animal started off at speed, but in the least favourable direction it could have taken, heading towards the ascent on the side of which the horsemen and a few carriages were drawn up. Then slackened its pace to a jerking, springing trot — paused — changed its mind — lowered its head — dashed wildly down the hill to disappear through a high thick bull-finch, and after a few seconds came again into view, travelling swift and straight across the Vale.

The General smoked quietly, but his eye brightened, and he seemed ten years younger for the sight.

"It's all right now," said he; "the sooner they lay them on the better."

Soldier Bill, drawing his girths, looked up with a beaming smile.

"They say there's a lady, a mysterious unknown, in a thick veil, who beats everybody with these hounds," he observed. "I wonder why she's not out to-day."

"I think she *is*," replied Daisy, shooting a mischievous glance at his wife. "I fancied I caught the flutter of a habit just now behind the hay-stack. I suppose she's determined to get a good start and cut Norah down!"

Ere the latter could reply, the hounds dashed across the line of the deer. Throwing their tongues in full musical notes, they spread like a fan, with noses in the air; then, stooping to the scent, converged, in one melodious crash and chorus, ere they took to running with a grim, silent determination that denoted the extremity of pace. Every man set his horse going at speed. Nearly a dozen selected their places in the first fence—a formidable bull-finch. The rest, turning rather away from the hounds, thundered wildly down to an open gate.

Amongst those who meant riding straight, it is needless to say, were Mrs. Walters and her three cavaliers. These landed in the second field almost together. Daisy, closely pursued by his wife, stealing through a weak place under a tree. The General sailing fairly over all, and Bill, unable to resist the temptation of a gap, made up with four strong rails, getting to the right side with a scramble that wanted very little of a nasty fall.

The hounds were already a quarter of a mile ahead, with nobody near them but a lady on a black hunter, who was well alongside, going, to all appearance, perfectly at her ease; while her groom, on a chesnut horse, left hopelessly behind, rode in the wake of the General, and wished he was at home.

Daisy, whose steeple-chasing experience had taught him never to lose his head, was the only one of our party who did not feel a little bewildered by the pace. Taking in everything at a glance, he observed the black hunter in front sail easily over a fence that few horses would have looked at. There was no mistaking the style and form of the animal. "Of course it is!" he muttered. "Satanella, by all that's inexplicable! We shall not catch them at *this* pace, however!" Then, pulling his horse to let his wife come up, he shouted in her ear, "Norah, that's Miss Douglas!"

Whether she heard him or not, the only answer Mrs. Walters vouchsafed was to lean back in her saddle and give Boneen a refresher with the whip.

Unlike a fox, whose reasons are logical and well considered, a deer will sometimes turn at right angles for no conceivable cause, pursuing the new line with as much speed and decision as the old.

In the present instance the animal, after leaping a high thorn fence with two ditches, broke short off in a lateral direction, under the very shadow of the hedge it had just cleared, and at the pace they were going the hounds, as a natural consequence, over-ran the scent.

Miss Douglas pulled up her horse, and did not interfere. There being, fortunately, no one to assist them, they flung themselves beautifully, swinging back to the line and taking it up again with scarcely the loss of a minute. The President, two fields off, struggling hard to get nearer, was perhaps the only man out who sufficiently appreciated their steadiness. Like Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, "he blessed them unaware." Bill, I fear, did the *other* thing, for the fence was so high he never saw them turn, and jumped well into their midst, happily without doing any damage.

This slight delay, however, had the effect of bringing Daisy, his wife, Soldier Bill, and the General into the same field with Miss Douglas. She heard the footfall of their horses, looked round, and set the black mare going faster than before. If—as, indeed, seemed probable—she was resolved not to be overtaken, the pack, streaming away at speed once more, served her purpose admirably. No horse alive could catch them; and Satanella herself seemed doing her best to keep on tolerable terms at that terrific pace. The majority of the field had already been hopelessly distanced. The General found the superior animal he rode fail somewhat in the deep holding meadows. Bill was in difficulties, although he had religiously adhered to the shortest way. Even Daisy began to wish for a pull, and only little Boneen, quite thorough-bred, and as good as he was sluggish, kept galloping on, strong and full of running as at the start. For more than a mile our friends proceeded with but a slight alteration in their relative positions—Satanella, perhaps, gradually leaving her followers, and the hounds drawing away from all five. In this order two or three flying fences were negotiated, and a fair brook cleared. Daisy, looking back in some anxiety, could not but admire the form in which Norah roused and handled Boneen. That good little horse, bred and trained in Ireland, seemed to combine the activity of a cat with the sagacious instincts of a dog. Like all of his blood, he only left off being lazy when his companions began to feel tired; and

Mrs. Walters, coming up with her husband, as they rose the hill from the waterside, declared, though he did not hear her, "I could lead the hunt now, Daisy, if you'd let me. Little Boneen's as pleased as Punch! He'd like to pull hard, only he's such a good boy he doesn't know how!"

Bill's horse dropped its hind legs in the brook, and fell, but was soon up again with its rider. The General got over successfully; nevertheless, his weight was beginning to tell, and the ground being now on the ascent, he found himself the last of the five people with the hounds.

At the crest of the hill frowned a black, forbidding-looking bull-finch: on this side a strong rail; on the other, if a horse ever got there, *the uncertainty*, which might or might *not* culminate in a rattling fall. Daisy glanced anxiously to right and left, on his wife's behalf, but there was no forgiveness. They must have it, or go home! Then he watched how the famous black mare would acquit herself a hundred yards ahead of him, and felt little reassured to detect such a struggle in the air while she topped the fence, as by no means inferred a pleasant landing where she disappeared on its far side.

He wavered, he hesitated, and pulled his horse off for a stride; but Norah's impatient "Ah, Daisy! go on now!" urged him to the attempt, and he *chanced* it, with his heart in his mouth, for her sake, not his own.

Taking fast hold of his horse's head, he got over with a scramble, turning afterwards in the saddle to watch how it fared with his wife and little Boneen. Her subsequent account described the performance better than could any words of mine.

"When I loosed him off at it," said she, "I just touched him on the shoulder with the whip, to let him know he wasn't in Kildare. He understood well enough, the little darling! for he pricked his ears, and came back to a slow canter; but I'd like ye to have felt the bound he made when he rose to it! Such a place beyond! 'Twas as thick as a cabbage-garden—dog-roses, honeysuckles, I'm not sure there wasn't cauliflowers, and all, twisted up together to conceal a deep, wide, black-looking hole, like a boreen.* Well, I just felt him give a sort of a kick, while he left the entire perplexity ten feet behind him, and when he landed, as light as a fairy, Daisy, I'm sure I heard him laugh!"

Mrs. Walters, like most of her nation, abounded in enthusiasm. She could not forbear a little cry of delight at the panorama that opened before her, when she had effected the above-mentioned feat. To the very horizon lay stretched a magnificent vale of pasture, brightened by the slanting rays of a November sun. Far ahead, fleeting across the level below, sped a dark object, she recognised for the deer;

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* "Boreen,"—Irish for a deep, stone-paved lane.

a field nearer were the hounds, running their hardest, in a string that showed they too had caught sight of their game. Half-way down the hill she was herself descending the other lady was urging the black mare to headlong speed, very dangerous on such a steep incline. Fifty yards behind Satanella came Daisy, and close on his heels, Norah, wild with delight, feeling a strong inclination to give Boneen his head, and go by them all. The little horse, however, watched his stable-companion narrowly, while his rider's eyes were riveted on the hounds. Suddenly she felt him shorten his stride and stop, with a jerk, that nearly shot her out of the saddle. Glancing at Daisy for an explanation, she screamed aloud, and covered her face with her hands.

When she looked again, she was aware of her husband's horse staring wildly about with the bridle over its head; of Daisy himself on foot; and a few yards off the good black mare prostrate, motionless, rolled up in a confused and hideous mass with her hapless rider.

Down hill, at racing pace, Satanella had put her fore-feet through a covered drain, with the inevitable result—the surface gave way, letting her in to the shoulders, and a few yards farther on, she lay across her mistress, with her neck broken, never to stir those strong, fleet limbs again.

"Oh! Daisy, they're both killed!" whispered Norah, with a drawn, white face, while her husband, busying himself to undo the girths, and thus extricate that limp, helpless figure from beneath the weight that crushed it so sorely, shouted for assistance to Soldier Bill and the General, who at that moment entered the field together.

"I trust in heaven *not!*" he replied aloud; and, below his breath, even while his heart smote him for the thought, "It might have been worse. My darling, it might have been *you!*"

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BITTER END.

IT was indeed a sad sight for those joyous riders, exulting but a moment before in all the triumph and excitement of their gallop. Saddest and most pitiable for the General, thus to find and recognise the woman he had loved and lost. While they took her gently out from under the dead mare's carcase, she groaned feebly, and they said, "Thank God!" for at least there seemed left a faint spark of life. Assistance, too, was near at hand. As Norah observed, "'Twasn't like Kildare, where ye wouldn't have seen a shealing or may be so much as a potato-garden for miles. But every farm here was kept like a domain, and they'd built a dwelling-house almost in every field." Within a short distance stood the comfortable mansion, surrounded by its well-stocked fold-yards, of a substantial yeoman; and Bill, with two falls, was there in two minutes! A few of the second flight also, persevering resolutely on the line the hounds had gone, straggled up and did good service. What became of the Field, and where the deer was taken, none of these had opportunity to ascertain. All their energies, all their sympathies, were engrossed by that helpless, motionless form, that beautiful rigid face, so wan and white, beneath its folds of glossy raven hair.

Carrying her softly and carefully on a gate to her place of shelter, it looked as if they formed a funeral procession, of which the General seemed chief-mourner.

His bearing was stern and composed, his step never faltered, nor did his hand shake; but he who wrestled with the angel of old, and prevailed against him, could scarcely have outdone this loving, longing heart in earnestness of purpose and passionate pleading of prayer.

"But once more!" was his petition. "Only that she may know me, and look on me once more!" And it was granted.

For two days Blanche Douglas neither spoke nor stirred. Mrs. Walters constituted herself head nurse, and never left her pillow. The General remained the whole time at the threshold of her chamber.

The surgeon, a country practitioner of high repute, who saw her within an hour of her accident, committed himself to no opinion by word or sign, but shook his head despondingly the moment he found himself alone. The famous London doctor, telegraphed for at once, preserved an ominous silence. He, too, getting into the fly that took him back to the station, looked grave and shook his head. The hospitable yeoman, who placed his house and all he had freely at the sufferer's disposal, packing off the very children to their aunt's, at the next farm, felt, as he described it, "down-hearted—uncommon." His kindly wife went about softly and in tears. Daisy and Bill hurried to and fro, in every direction, as required, by night and day; while Norah, watching in the darkened room, tried to hope against hope, and pray for that which she dared not even think it possible could be granted.

The General looked the quietest and most composed of all. Calm and still, he seemed less to watch than to wait. Perhaps some subtler instinct than theirs taught him the disastrous certainty, revealed to him the inevitable truth.

Towards evening of the second day Norah came into the passage and laid her hand on his shoulder, as he sat gazing vacantly from the window, over the fields and orchards about the farm. They loomed hazy and indistinct in the early winter twilight, but the scene on which he looked was clear enough—a bright sunny slope, a golden gleam in the sky above, and on earth a dark heap, with a trailing habit, and a slender riding-whip clenched in a small gloved hand.

"She has just asked for you," whispered Norah. "Go to her—quick! God bless you, General! Try and bear it like a man!"

The room was very dark. He stole softly to her bedside, and felt his fingers clasped in the familiar clinging touch once more.

"My darling!" he murmured, and the strong man's tears welled up, thick and hot, like a child's.

Her voice came, very weak and low. "The poor mare!" she said; "is she much hurt? It was no fault of hers."

He must have answered, and told her the truth without knowing it; for she proceeded, more feebly than before.

"Both of us! Then it's no use. I was going to give her to you, dear, and ask you to take care of her for my sake. Have you—have you forgiven?"

"Forgiven!" His failing accents were even less steady than her own.

"I vexed you dreadfully," she continued. "I was not good enough for you. I see it all; and, if it could come again, I would never leave you—never! But I did it for the best. I took great pains to hide myself away down here; but I'm glad—yes, I'm very glad you found me out at last. How dark it is! Don't let go my hand. Kiss me, my own! I know now that I *did* love you dearly—far better than I thought."

The feeble grasp tightened, stronger, stronger yet. The shadows fell, the night came down, and a pale moon threw its ghostly light into the chamber. But the face he loved was fixed and grey now, the hand he clasped was stiff and cold in death!

The General carried to India a less sore heart, perhaps, than he had expected. There was no room left for the gnawing anxiety, the bitter sense of humiliation, the persistent struggle against self, that distressed and troubled him in his previous relations with her he had loved so dearly, and lost so cruelly even in the hour she became his own. He was grave and silent, no doubt; in feelings and appearance, many years beyond his real age; but every fresh grey hair, every additional symptom of decay, seemed only a milestone nearer home. Without speculating much on its locality, he cherished an ardent hope that soon he might follow to the place where she had gone before. None should come between them there, he thought, and they need never part again.

Soldier Bill and Daisy saw the last of him when he left England: the former rather envied every one who was bound for a sphere in which there seemed a possibility of seeing real service; the latter comparing his senior's lonely life and blighted hopes with his own happy lot, felt a humbler, a wiser, and a better man for the contrast.

Mrs. Walters, though losing none of her good-nature and genial Irish humour, became more staid in manner, altogether more matronly; and though she went out hunting on occasion, certainly rode less boldly than before the catastrophe. Her sister Mary, however, who came over to stay with her about this time, kept up the family credit for daring, and would have taken Bill's heart by storm (if she had not won it already) with the fearlessness she displayed in following him over the most formidable obstacles. After a famous day on Boneen, when she bustled that lazy little gentleman along in a manner that perfectly electrified him, Bill could hold out no longer, but placed himself, his fortunes, Catamount, and Benjamin, at her disposal. All these she was good enough to accept but the badger; and that odorous animal was compelled to evacuate his quarters in the wardrobe for a more suitable residence out of barracks, at a livery-stable. So they were married in London, and inaugurated the first day of their honeymoon by a quick thing with the Windsor drag-hounds.

Of Mrs. Lushington there is little more to be said. The sad fate of her former friend she accepted with the resignation usually displayed by those of her particular set, in the face of such afflictions as do not immediately affect themselves and their pleasures. She vowed it was very sad, talked of wearing black—but didn't! and went out to dinner much as usual. Even Bessie Gordon showed more feeling, for she *did* cry when she heard the news, and appeared that night at a ball with swollen eyelids and a red place under her nose. Many people asked what had become of Miss Douglas? The answer was usually something to this effect—

"Don't you remember? Painful business; shocking accident. Killed out hunting. Odd story; odd girl. Yes—handsome, but very peculiar style."

They buried the good black mare where she fell. Long before the grass was green over her grave rider and horse had been very generally forgotten. Yet in their own circle both had created no small sensation in their time. But life is so far like the chase, that it admits of but little leisure for hesitation; none whatever for regret. How should we ever get to the finish if we must needs stop to pick up the fallen, or to mourn for the dead?

In certain kind and faithful hearts, however, it is but justice to say the memory of that hapless pair remains fresh and vivid as on the day of their fatal downfall.

There is a stern, grey-headed soldier in the East who sees Blanche Douglas nightly in his dreams; and Daisy Walters, in his highest state of exultation, when he has been well-carried, as often happens, through a run, heaves a sigh, and feels something aching at his heart, that recalls the black mare and her lovely wayward rider, while it reminds him in a ghostly whisper that "there never was one yet like Satanella!"

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